

VIZETELLY'S ONE-VOLUME NOVELS.

XXII.

The
Friend of the Family;
AND
The Gambler.

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THE FRIEND OF THE FAMILY.

PART I.

CHAPTER I.

MY uncle, Colonel Egor Ilitch Rostáneff, on his retirement from the army, went to live at Stepáncikoff, the estate which he inherited from his grandmother; and there he settled down into quiet country existence so naturally that one would have supposed he had never been out of the place all his life. There are some natures which are content with anything that falls to their lot, and such was my uncle's. You could not imagine a more easily satisfied, a more gentle nature than his. He was the sort of man, that, if any one asked him seriously to carry them a couple of miles or so on his back, he would do it at once. His was so generous a disposition that he was ready at any time to give up all he had about him to the first person that asked him for it, and would gladly take off his own shirt for the benefit of anyone else who happened to want one.

In personal appearance he was a soldierly-looking man; tall and well built, with ruddy cheeks and teeth which were as white as ivory; long brown moustache, and a loud, frank, hearty voice, and a jolly laugh. He spoke rather abruptly and fast. He was forty years old when he inherited Stepáncikoff, and had been in the hussars ever since he was sixteen. He had married early, and loved his wife to distraction; but she had died, leaving in his heart an irradicable impression of love and gratitude. On inheriting this estate he had left the service and come down to live here with his children—little eight year-old

Iliusha (whose birth had been the cause of his mother's death), and Sásha—a girl of fifteen—who, since the loss of her mother, had been brought up at a certain school in Moscow. But before very long my poor uncle's house became a sort of Noah's ark, and this is how it fell out:

Just about the time that my uncle inherited Stepnáchikoff and retired from the service, his mother, who had married a General Krahotkin about sixteen years before (while uncle was still a cornet, but was thinking of marrying for all that), became a widow. She had objected to my uncle's marriage, pointing out that his little estate of two hundred souls* (which he possessed at that time and which was not this Stepanchikoff), was barely sufficient to support his family without a wife;—by "his family" meaning herself and her tribe of companions and hangers-on and numerous cats, dogs, and so on. She accused him of selfishness, of ingratitude, of courtesy—and suddenly, in the midst of her reproaches and revilings, she got married herself, before her son's wedding, being then forty-two years of age. However, she still found plenty of scope for reproaches, and declared that she was obliged to marry in order to provide a refuge for her old age. She refused to have anything more to do with her selfish son, who had shown her so little respect and who had had the audacity to wish to make a home for himself.

I never could find out the real reason why so long-headed a man, as the defunct General Krahotkin appears to have been, could ever have married this widow of forty-two! I believe he must have thought she had money. Many people said that he simply required a nurse, feeling the approach of the swarms of maladies which attacked him in his old age. One thing is very certain, that the old man was far from feeling the smallest particle of affection for his wife during the whole period of their companionship, and laughed at her and showed his contempt for her at every possible opportunity.

He was a strange man; well educated and by no means stupid, he had no faith in anybody or anything, recognised no laws, despised everyone, and in his old age, thanks to illness and the irregularity of the life he had led, became cross and irritable to a most pitiable degree.

He had been obliged to retire from the service with more haste than dignity in consequence of a certain "rather disagreeable occurrence;" in fact he had barely escaped worse

* Serfs.

things, and had sacrificed his pension. This quite ruined him, morally and physically. With no means of his own, or but a wretched hundred souls, he now folded his hands and for the remainder of his life—twelve years—never inquired how he lived or who supported him, yet he did not retrench his expenses, but lived in good style and kept his carriage. Soon after this he lost the use of his legs, and for the remaining ten years of his life he was wheeled about in a comfortable chair by a couple of footmen, whom he abused in the most dreadful language on all occasions.

This carriage, these footmen and the other luxuries, were paid for by Mrs. General's selfish son, who deprived himself of the necessaries of life, contracted debts, and mortgaged his property, in order to send the money regularly to his mother, who never ceased to call him selfish and egotistical for all that. But my uncle was that sort of man that he soon came to believe that he really was selfish and egotistical ; and therefore, in self-punishment, and in order to do his best to reform his selfish nature, he sent more and more money.

Mrs. General respected her husband, chiefly because he was a general and that she was therefore Mrs. General.

She lived in her own private apartments—and he in his—but both under one roof. My grandmother was the great lady of her town—all scandals began within her walls ; everybody tried to make her godmother to their children ; she had the first place everywhere ; in fact she got out of her general's rank all there was to be got out of it. This amply compensated her for the domestic trials to which she was subjected. Her husband despised her. He was a free-thinker and an atheist of the old school and a materialist ; but the company he had at N—— to listen to his doctrines were not of his way of thinking, and one by one they left him.

The general attempted domestic whist parties ; but these invariably ended in grief and hard swearing, and Mrs. General and her crew fled from the table in terror, attending to their religious duties and to charitable works very devoutly for some time after, and awaiting the next game in terrible fear ; for the general was not at all particular in his language when ladies were present, and they well knew that the game would end by the general's cutting his partner and driving her from the table—if not striking her ! All this would happen for no better reason than that some wretched individual had played a knave when a nine would have taken the trick,

At last, owing to the failure of his eyesight, the general was obliged to engage a reader, and Thomas Tomich Opuiskin appeared on the scene.

I confess I approach the introduction of this new character with all the solemnity I can command. This personage is destined to play a prominent part in the present story; readers shall judge for themselves how far worthy of their attention the character of this great man may be.

Thomas Tomich entered the general's household in the humble capacity of a hanger-on; he received his board and lodgings for services rendered. The secret as to whence he came is hidden in the mist of obscurity. However, I made inquiries long after and did learn a few details of the career of this most remarkable man.

It was said that he had served in some office, and had been a victim to the cause of Right—of course! It was said, moreover, that he had had something to do with literature in Moscow—and why not? his crass ignorance certainly need not have stood in the way of that line of employment! However, all that is known for certain is, that nothing came of his literary efforts, and that he was obliged to enter the general's service in the capacity of reader and martyr. There was no humiliation which he would not put up with for a bit of the general's bread.

It is true, though, that after the general's death, when Thomas suddenly became a great man, he often reminded us that he had condescended to act as the general's butt, in former days, only by a high minded sacrifice of self on the altar of friendship, that the general was his benefactor, and that the general was a great man, although only to him, Thomas, had it been permitted to peep into the inmost recesses of his great soul; and further that if he—Thomas—had consented to act the fool for the general's delectation, or to imitate various animals, he did so merely for the sake of amusing a poor old suffering friend, and at great cost to himself. However, Thomas Tomich's explanations must be accepted with caution and some doubt; and meanwhile, though acting in the capacity of reader and fool at the general's side of the establishment, Thomas played a very different part among the ladies in the other wing.

How he had obtained the position he enjoyed there it is impossible for anyone but an expert in such matters to determine.

Mrs. General held him in a sort of mystical veneration—why?

I cannot tell you. Little by little he had established his influence over all the ladies in the house in a most complete and astonishing manner. He used to read devotional books to them and discourse eloquently upon the Christian virtues; told them stories of his own life; went to the morning service every day; expounded their dreams for them and did a little prophesying on his own account.

The general was aware of the veneration in which Thomas was held by the ladies and tyrannized over him all the more; but the fact that Thomas was bullied only raised him in the estimation of his female friends.

At length everything was changed. The general died.

His death was original and instructive. This free-thinker, this atheist, became terribly frightened when death approached. He wept, confessed, kissed the ikon,* sent for the priest and went through the appointed religious observances. The wretched man shrieked that he did not want to die, and asked pardon of Thomas with tears in his eyes.

This last fact was of immense advantage to Thomas in his future life. However, just before the general's body and soul parted company, a characteristic episode occurred.

Mrs. General's daughter by her first marriage, my Aunt Proakóvia—an old maid, who always lived with Mrs. General, and who was one of the general's favourite victims, she alone of all people being able to treat his violence and abuse with gentle and unfailing toleration, and to repay it with a thousand kind attentions to himself—my aunt was sitting at the general's bedside weeping bitterly, and had just risen to arrange his pillows, when the sick man, in a paroxysm of rage which almost made him foam at the mouth, caught hold of her hair and pulled it three times with all his strength; a few minutes after this fact he was dead.

My uncle, the colonel, was informed of General Krahotkin's death, but Mrs. General declared she would sooner die than see my uncle at such a moment.

The funeral was very magnificent,—needless to say at the expense of that disrespectful selfish son whom Mrs. General would not bring herself to look at.

A tomb-stone, upon which the inventive genius of Thomas had lavished eloquent tributes to the general's goodness and virtue and wisdom, was set up in memory of the noble departed;

* Holy image.

and for many a day Mrs. General lent a deaf ear to the entreaties of her son for forgiveness. She would sit, surrounded by her companions and kangers-on, and declare with sobs and tears that she would sooner eat dry bread (watered, of course, with her tears !) and limp begging from house to house, than agree to her disrespectful son's request that she would come and live with him at Stepánczikoff, and that never, *never* should a foot of hers enter his dwelling ! It may be mentioned however that, all this while, preparations were gradually being made for a transfer of Mrs. General and her possessions to new quarters.

My uncle lamed all his horses in doing the journey of thirty miles and back from Stepánczikoff to the town, every day : and it was not till a fortnight after the funeral that he obtained permission to see his offended mother for the first time.

Thomas Tomich was employed in the negotiation, and during the whole fortnight he so worked upon the "selfish egotist's" feelings by describing the "inhumanity" of his conduct, that the colonel was brought to tears of shame and despair. From this time dates the inconceivable despotism of Thomas Tomich's influence over my poor uncle. Thomas guessed the character of the man he had to deal with, and felt that his role of butt and bufsoon was over for ever—he was destined for great things—and so he began at once.

"What should you do now," said Thomas, "if your mother—the author of your days, so to speak—were ready to take a stick, and with trembling hands attenuated with hunger go about from house to house begging alms ? would not this be slightly inconsistent first with her rank, and secondly with her virtuous character ? How would you feel if she were to come, some fine day, to your own window (accidentally, of course, but it might easily happen !) and stretch her poor thin hand to you as you lay within on some luxurious couch—oh ! dreadful, dreadful ! But it is still more horrible, colonel—and you must allow me to say it candidly—it is still more horrible to see you standing here before me like an inanimate log, blinking your eyes and opening your mouth in this unseemly manner, when you should be tearing your hair while listening to what I say, and beating your breast, and weeping streams and rivers and lakes—seas—oceans of tears ! "

Thomas rambled a good deal, but that was always the way of his eloquence. Of course the end of it all was that Mrs. General, with all her cats and dogs, with Thomas Tomich, and

with Miss Pereplitsin, her companion-in-chief, gratified Stepán-chikoff at last with her presence.

She gave out that she was come on trial; to see how her son was going to treat her. One can imagine the position of my wretched uncle while this trial was going on! For the first month or two Mrs. General, in her character of newly bereaved widow, thought it incumbent upon her to fall continually into hysterical despair in memory of her deceased general. On these occasions the colonel suffered,—I don't know why, but he did.

Very often, generally when any visitors were present, Mrs. General would call up her grandchildren, Iliusha and Sáša, and press them to her bosom; after which she would gaze long and sadly at them—as upon children who must be looked on as lost with such a father to depend upon, and then burst into tears, which tears would continue to flow for an hour. Woe betide the wretched colonel if he did not understand those tears—and he never did seem to understand them either! Occasionally, too, Mrs. General, without any apparent reason, would fall on to the sofa in a fainting condition, and a pretty to-do there was then—such a running about! and the wretched colonel in an agony of remorse and fear and everything else, and trembling like a leaf! "Cruel son!" Mrs. General would cry, on regaining consciousness—"cruel son! you rend my very heart-strings!"

"Why? how do I rend them, mamma?" the colonel would inquire timidly.

"There! he rends me; and then he tries to justify himself—oh! cruel son—you are killing me, I am dying of your cruelty!" Of course the wretched colonel was hopelessly bowled over on such occasions, and it is needless to observe that Mrs. General did not die! My uncle would button-hole somebody as soon as he could after one of these eruptions, and say something of this sort:

"You see, my dear fellow, she's a general's widow, a *grande dame*—and accustomed to all sorts of things that—Ah well! I know I'm to blame; I don't know exactly what I did to offend her, but she's a kind hearted woman, and I know I must be wrong—"

Miss Pereplitsin occasionally felt it her duty to read my uncle a lecture.

"You are not respectful to your mother—yes! that's what it is! You are ~~wilful~~—yes! and you offend her; she is not accustomed to such treatment—she is a general's widow, and you are only a colonel!"

"She's a fine woman, that Miss Pereplitsin!" my uncle would declare. "How she sticks up for mamma—a capital girl she is! and you mustn't suppose that she's a mere hanger-on, oh dear no! She is a major's daughter herself—she is indeed." And yet Mrs. General, who could treat her son in this way, was like a mouse before her former dependent. Thomas Tomich had bewitched her entirely. She saw with his eyes and heard with his ears. Some people insisted that Thomas's influence over Mrs. General could only be the result of more than friendly relations between them; but I am sure it was not so—and I cannot explain the mystery otherwise than by giving the reader a sketch of Thomas's character as I learned it at a later date.

Fancy a man, narrow-minded, of no consequence to anyone in the world, rejected by society, of no ability, ugly, but intensely vain though dowered with not one single gift which could justify his vanity! A failure in his earlier attempts in literature, he had joined that great army of mortified authors—the non-successful! Nevertheless I believe his love of brag dates from this time;—at all events his one great need and passion now was to posture, and pose, and show off before *somebody*, somewhere! I remember hearing him say, when he had gained his ascendancy in my uncle's house:

"Don't consider me a fixture here, please! I am only staying a while to observe you all, and set you right, and then I'm off to Moscow to edit a magazine! Thirty thousand people shall feel delighted every month to read my thoughts! My name shall be known, and then woe to my enemies!"

I remember that Thomas quite persuaded my uncle that he (Thomas) had been sent into the world for a definite purpose; and that somebody with wings appeared to him at night and specified what he had to do, or some cock-and-bull story of that kind. He said that he was predestined to write some devotional or religious work of prodigious importance, at whose appearance the earth was to tremble, and Russia would be convulsed from end to end; after which he was to enter a monastery and pray day and night for the rest of his life, for the well-being of the country; and, of course, my uncle was quite taken in by all this.

Imagine what the outcome of such a character and such a career as his would be! Thomas, the once persecuted, if not the actually beaten—Thomas, the secretly voluptuous and vain—Thomas, the despot heart in spite of his past insignificance—Thomas, the miserable fool and martyr suddenly raised to

honour and glory thanks to an idiotic protectress—Thomas, who could deceive, as he liked, the too easy proprietor of the house into which fate had propelled him'.

As to my uncle's character, I shall have to treat of that more fully afterwards—for without some explanation, Thomas's ascendancy would be incomprehensible, but I will only now say that I applied a proverb to illustrate Thomas's character, "put him at a table and he'll put his feet on it."

A low nature escaping out of persecution will persecute others in its turn. Thomas had been bullied and he now felt the need to be a bully himself. He had been a butt, and he now felt that he must have others to vent his own spleen upon. He bragged inconceivably, bullied everybody, was exacting and tyrannical to a degree. Outsiders, when they heard of his doings and of his influence in the household, crossed themselves and spat on the ground ; they thought it could be nothing short of a devil in him.

I have spoken of my uncle ; and I now repeat that without some explanation of his remarkable character, it would be impossible to comprehend the impudent ascendancy of Thomas in a strange house, and the metamorphosis of the pitiful butt of the general's time into the great man of to-day.

Besides being kind-hearted to the extreme limits of benevolence, my uncle was possessed of a most sensitive and delicate instinct, in spite of his rather rough exterior. His spirit was as pure as any child's. He simply *was* a forty-year-old child ;—expansive and merry to a degree, always pre-supposing every person he met to be an angel of goodness, always blaming himself for the faults of others and exaggerating their virtues, even finding beauties of character where none existed. His was one of those nobly sensitive natures which are ashamed to attribute any evil to others, but attribute much good, and who rejoice at the successes of others. Their mission is to sacrifice themselves to the interests of their fellows. Some would have called him a weak, characterless, small-minded man : of course he was weak, and sometimes much too long-suffering ; but this was not from lack of firmness, but from the dread of wounding others, or of acting unkindly. He certainly did want character, too, in matters where his own advantage was concerned—which profit he neglected so utterly, and systematically, that he was a laughing stock to many people all his life, and very often to those for whose sake he had sacrificed his personal interest.

He never would believe that he had enemies,—and though he had some he never remarked their existence. He could not bear any quarrel in the household ; he would submit to anything at the first appearance of an impending row. He used to yield out of a sort of timid delicacy and kindness of heart, "so that everyone may feel contented and happy," as he would express it.

There was no doubt about it, my uncle was easily led by any generous influence exerted upon him ; indeed, any ingenuous scoundrel could persuade him to an evil action, so long as he masked that action under the guise of good.

My uncle readily trusted anybody, and was often taken in for his pains ; but when, to his grief, he was forced to the conclusion that any one had really cheated him, he would invariably end by discovering that it was somehow or other through his own fault.

Now imagine the sudden descent into my uncle's quiet household of a capricious, idiotic old woman, together with another idiotic person—her idol ; an old woman who, until now, had at least been held in check to some extent by her general, but who now felt that the time was come to take it out of others for what she had herself suffered ; an old idiot whom my uncle was bound to hold in veneration because she was his mother !

The invaders began by proving to my uncle that his was a rude, overbearing, ignorant and extremely egotistical nature. It was a remarkable thing that the idiotic old woman believed this herself—and I think Thomas Tomich must have believed it more or less, too ! They managed to persuade the colonel that Thomas was specially sent by heaven to save his (the colonel's) soul, and to teach him to obtain the mastery over his evil passion. They proved him to be proud, arrogant, and stingy—even to the extent of grudging Thomas his daily crust !—and my wretched uncle very soon believed that he had fallen to this hopeless depth of ignominy, and was ready to tear his hair with remorse and to ask pardon all round.

"I am very much to blame, I know it," he would say to any one whom he could get hold of to listen. "One ought to be much more careful when one has to do with a man who happens to be indebted more or less. *Indeed* to me ! what a fool I am—it is I who am indebted to him for coming to live here ! and yet I grudge him his bread ! *At least* I don't grudge it a bit, you know ; but my stupid tongue must have blurted something out that made it appear so. I often do that sort of

thing. Well ! and this is a man who has suffered,—a man who sacrificed himself to an invalid for *ten years*, my dear sir—a man like that should be treated with deference and respect, not offended ! A clever man, too !—literary and scientific—a most noble-minded man ! ”

The picture of Thomas, the learned but unfortunate, acting the part of a common fool to a capricious old master, filled my uncle's generous heart with noble rage and sympathy. And all that was ever strange or petty in Thomas's conduct was invariably attributed by him to the sufferings and humiliations which Thomas had endured in former days ; and he would reason that from a man who had gone through so much it was impossible to expect what one would hope to get from other men, and that one must not only forgive, but soothe and heal the wounds with tenderness and humanity ! Having once made up his mind on this point, my uncle was incapable of detecting that his new friend was a mere sensual capricious little wretch, an egotist, lazy and indolent, and nothing more.

As to Thomas's learning and genius, my uncle believed in these absolutely ; and I may add that the colonel revered the words “science” and “literature” to an absurd degree—though he scarcely knew anything whatever about either. This was one of my uncle's chief eccentricities, of which he had many, and all most innocent.

“ He is composing something,” he would say, walking on tiptoes some two rooms off the place where Thomas was supposed to be writing. “ I don't know exactly *what*,” he would add with a mysterious air and with great pride, “ but something pretty *strong*, you may depend upon it ! I mean *strong*, in a noble sense of the word, of course ! You and I wouldn't understand it probably; it's something about ‘motive powers’—he told me to himself; something political, I suppose ! . . . Oh yes, my dear sir ! his name will make itself known, yet—and then you and I shall have some of his reflected glory—he told me we should, himself ! ”

I know for a fact that Thomas made my uncle shave off his handsome dark moustache. Thomas said the moustache made him look like a Frenchman, and that that was not patriotic. Little by little Thomas took up the management of the estate. He would go out and talk to the serfs : beginning about agricultural matters, though he did not know oats from wheat, he would go on to treat of the duties of the moujik to his master;

touch lightly upon electricity and so on, of which he knew absolutely nothing at all ; would explain how the earth revolved round the sun, and end by telling them, in the most condescending manner, all about the ministers of the crown ; being by this time in rare good humour in consequence of his own eloquence. The serfs invariably listened to him with servility—Thomas loved that. I overheard this conversation one day : " Tell us, little father," said an old moujik, one of the crowd among whom he was standing, " tell us how much salary the Emperor used to pay you ? "

But Thomas considered this question much too familiar.

" What's that to you, you old idiot ? " he cried. " What are you opening your mouth for—do you wish me to spit into it ? " Thomas always addressed the enlightened Russian moujik in this polite phraseology.

" But, father," said another peasant, " we are only ignorant moujiks,—what we want to know is by what title to address you, are you major, or colonel, or your excellency ? "

" Why, you fool ! what do I care about salary, do you suppose ? Many men of general's rank get ~~nothing~~ salary ! I had twenty thousand roubles a year from the ~~ministry~~, but I never took it—I preferred to leave it for the ~~enlightenment~~ of Russia, and for the benefit of the burnt-out inhabitants of Kasan ! " The moujiks were much impressed with this, and with Thomas Tomich generally.

His conversations with my uncle were of a different kind.

" What were you like before ? " he would ask, for instance, lying full length in a comfortable arm-chair after a capital dinner, with a servant standing behind to brush away the flies. " what were you like before I came ? I lighted the spark of heavenly fire which is now ablaze in your soul. Did I ignite this spark of heavenly fire ? answer me—was it I who lighted it ? " Thomas Tomich did not know himself why he asked such a question as this, but my uncle's impatience and silence annoyed him all the same. " I have suffered, performed, and long suffered. No one who has not been buried in gunpowder, at the smallest shot, is unaccustomed. But Uncle's silence offended him, and he said again, " answer me, answer ! "

" Answer me ! " he said, " you are not a man who does not know what to say ! "

My poor uncle Tomich did not know what to say. " Mais répondre quoi, Papa ? " said Mrs. General, and laid her hands on her shoulders.

"I ask you whether that spark has ignited the heavenly fire in your soul or not?" repeated Thomas, condescendingly, helping himself to a bumper from a box which stood by him on the table, at all times, by Mrs. General's orders.

"I really don't know, Thomas!" replied uncle, at last, in despairing accents. "I think there is something of the sort going on inside me, but don't force me to a direct yes or no, for I might say what is not strictly true!"

"Oh! then according to your ideas I am so insignificant that I need never have a reply to my questions—that's what you wish to imply; very well, then I am a nobody!"

"No, no, Thomas! nothing of the sort—bless your soul! when did I imply anything of the kind?"

"Oh, yes! you wanted to make that implication!"

"But my dear fellow, I swear to you that I did not."

"Oh, very well! then I am a liar, too! then let it be so—let this new insult be added to the number of those I have already borne, I can bear this, too!"

"Now you will!" cried Mrs. General, in alarm.

"Thomas Tomich! Mamma!" said poor uncle, in despair, "on my honour I am not guilty—or if I am, it was pure accident. You won't be too particular with me, Thomas, I am so simple—I know it, you needn't tell me—I feel it; and would you believe it, Thomas, I lived forty years in a state of self-satisfaction before you came, and never dreamed what a sinner and foolish beast I was and am. I must have heaped up such a pile of wickedness that I wonder the earth does not swallow me up."

"Yes, you are selfish," said the gratified Thomas.

"I know it, I know it; but it's all over now; I'm going to be a better man and kinder."

"Heaven grant it!" cried Thomas piously, rising from his chair and proceeding towards his own room to enjoy the after-dinner smoke which that great man always allowed himself.

At the conclusion of this chapter, permit me to explain my own relations with my Uncle, and how it came about that I suddenly became compelled to face with Thomas Tomich, and how I suddenly and almost without notice into the midst of the very scenes of the catastrophes ever happened in Stepanchikoff. Please, however, be assured, I will narrate all my story without

any omission, and when I became an orphan, my uncle took

the place of my lost father, educated me at his own expense, and in fact did all that a father could have done for me. I became attached to him with all the love my heart could feel, from the first. I was ten years old, then, and we soon became great friends and thoroughly understood each other. Some years after, my uncle came up to St. Petersburg on the completion of my university course, and again I took to him with all the warmth of my heart.

After leaving the university, I lived on some time without employment, but with the usual presentiment of youth that I was to do great things before long. I did not wish to leave town, and I wrote very seldom to my uncle—only when I wanted money in fact, and he never failed to satisfy my demands.

Then I heard from some servant of uncle's, who had come to town on business, that strange things were happening at Stepanchikoff. This interested me much, and I took to writing to my uncle more regularly; he would reply strangely and mysteriously, avoiding my questions and trying to write of nothing but science, and of his hopes, on my account, of great things to come.

Suddenly, after a long silence, I received a most surprising letter, not at all like his usual ones. It was full of the strangest hints and contradictions, and at first I could not make head or tail of it. It was clear that the writer was in a most unusual state of mind; and one thing was very plain, namely, my uncle entreated and prayed me to consent to marry without delay a certain girl who had been his ward, the daughter of a poor government clerk called Edgevikin,—a young lady who had had an excellent education in Moscow at uncle's expense, and who was at the present moment governess to his children. He wrote that she was unhappy and that I could make her happy; that in doing so I should be performing a noble action; and that he intended to give her a good marriage portion. All this was worded in mysterious phraseology, and I was enjoined to maintain the strictest secrecy. This letter so bewildered me that my head whirled; indeed, does the young man exist upon whom such a proposition would not have a striking effect, if seen from its romantic side? Besides, I had heard that this young governess was an uncommonly pretty girl. However, I did not know what to do, and made up my mind to write to my uncle and say I would come down to Stepanchikoff at once, and send me money for the journey in the letter, by the way.

In spite of my resolution, I stopped in town in a state of great nervousness and trepidation for another fortnight; and during that period I met an old servant of my uncle's who had just been to Stepánchikoff, and who informed me of something which was quite new to me, namely, that Thomas Tomich and Mrs. General had made up their minds to marry my poor uncle to a crazy lady with a strange story of her own, and with half a million or so of roubles at her back; that Mrs. General had persuaded this lady that she was related to herself and had got her to come and stay in the house at Stepánchikoff; that my uncle was in despair, of course, but that the thing was pretty sure to end by his being obliged to marry the lady with the money; and, further, that Thomas and Mrs. General had commenced a systematic persecution of the poor governess, and were doing all within their power to force her out of the house, because they were afraid of the colonel falling in love with her, if indeed he had not done so already.

These last words struck me forcibly. However, when I asked my informant whether he really thought that my uncle was in love with the girl, I could get no direct reply; in fact the whole story was told me very unwillingly and with a remarkable absence of details.

I reflected that this version and my uncle's letter were plainly inconsistent; but there was no time to waste now; I must be off to Stepánchikoff at once, and not only console and support my poor uncle in his troubles, but save him if possible. I must kick Thomas out; then I must prevent the absurd marriage between my uncle and his crazy bride; and lastly,—pre-supposing that my uncle's love for the governess was but the creation of Thomas's imagination—I must make an unfortunate girl happy (a highly interesting young woman, too, by all accounts) by the offer of my hand and heart, and so on.

I remember my feelings during the journey down. I was exceedingly pleased with myself; I felt that I was doing a noble thing, that I was making a generous sacrifice of myself for the sake of a young and innocent and charming creature, whom it was in my power to render happy for ever. I felt ambitious, and longed to do something great—in fact I was extremely well pleased with myself. It was July, and the sun was shining brightly over the ripening corn in the fields as I passed by them; and I was—coupled up in town for so long—I was now only, for the first time, seeing God's earth at its best.

CHAPTER II.

I WAS approaching the end of my journey, when—passing the little town of B.—, which is seven or eight miles from Stepán-chikoff, I was obliged to stop at the blacksmith's because one of the wheels of my “tarantass” had come to grief—I determined to wait at the smithy while the men there set the mischief right; and as I climbed out of the tarantass I caught sight of a stout man who was in the same predicament as myself—having his vehicle put to rights. He had been standing here an hour, boiling over with impatience, and swearing hard all the while at the men who were working away at his handsome carriage; he seemed to be a remarkably good grumbler and swearer.

He appeared to be a man of about forty-five summers—very fat, middle height, and pock-marked. He looked like a well-to-do landed proprietor, and was dressed in clothes which were designed with a view to comfort rather than elegance.

I don't know why he should have been angry with me, since he had never seen me in his life before; however, he certainly was—I could see it at a glance. I judged from the conversation going on among his servants that he had just come from Stepánchikoff, from my uncle's place; which made me anxious to scrape acquaintance with him.

I was about to raise my hat and remark that “these delays upon the road were most disagreeable,” but he glared at me from head to foot so savagely that I was a little daunted; he then turned his back on me with a snort, and I felt that though his person from this point of view might be ever so interesting to the physiologically curious, yet he was not in the position best calculated for the receiving and answering the questions I desired to put to him!

So my attempts to make acquaintance failed for the present. However, an unexpected episode assisted me. It so happened that there stood near the blacksmith's forge an old carriage, which had been awaiting its turn to be mended for some days, and from the window of this carriage there suddenly looked out a drowsy, unwashed, unshaven face, blinking its eyes and looking as though it had but this moment awakened from heavy sleep. At the apparition the smith and his assistants all burst out laughing; and it appeared that the owner of the dirty face

at the window had been locked up in the carriage by them, and could not get out. He was drunk when they locked him in but he had now slept himself sober and was clamouring to be let out, and begging somebody to get him his tools. All this amused the assembled company greatly.

My fat friend enjoyed the scene exceedingly ;—there are people who find the greatest enjoyment in watching a drunken man, or a scolding match between two women, or anything of this sort, and he was evidently one of these. Little by little his angry frowns and glaring eyes softened down into an expression of amusement, and at last he laughed outright.

“ Why, that’s Vassilieff ! ” he said ; “ how on earth did he get there ? ”

“ Yes, yes, it’s Vassilieff, sir, sure enough ! ” resounded on all sides.

“ He was drunk, sir ! ” added an old moujik, apparently the “ starost ” or elder, “ he was drunk, he left his master three days ago and came here, so we are taking care of him. He’s asking for a chisel. What do you want your chisel for, you fool ? suppose you wish to pawn your last tool, do you ? ”

“ Oh, Arheep ! do let me out for goodness’ sake ! ” begged the prisoner.

“ There’s not a better carpenter in Moscow than that fellow,” said my fat friend, turning quite unexpectedly to me, “ and that’s how he always advertises his skill—by getting drunk ! Let him out, Arheep ! ” he added, altogether delighted with the scene.

The captive was let out, and emerged dirty and ragged and blinking into the strong sunlight. He shaded his eyes and looked around.

“ What a lot of people ! ” he said, “ and all sober too ! Good morning, friends ! ” Everybody laughed again.

“ Why, you ass, it’s nearly evening ! —aren’t you ashamed of yourself, Vassilieff ? ” asked the stout party.

“ It’s grief, sir, it’s all grief ! ” answered Vassilieff seriously ; but evidently pleased to have a chance of airing his grievances.

“ What sort of grief, you drunken fool ? ”

“ Why, grief such as I’ve never known before. Thomas Tomich is to be our new master ! ”

“ What—how—when ? ” shouted the stout gentleman, starting violently. I too also took a step forward ; for, most unexpectedly, their conversation was becoming of interest to me too.

"Why, all of us at Capuitonova ; our master, the colonel (God send him good health !) wants to give up the whole of Capuitonova to, Thomas Tomich—seventy souls ! 'There, Thomas !' says he, 'your father was a noble of extremely old family'—though nobody knew who he was or where he came from —'take Capuitonova and these seventy souls, and you shall be a landed proprietor and a noble too !'"

But my fat friend was listening no longer ; the main fact of the man's tale had so struck him that the effect was very extraordinary : he trembled all over, he grew livid, the whites of his eyes became bloodshot—I thought he was going to have a fit.

"It needed but this," he gasped ; "to make that scoundrel Thomas a landowner ! Bah ! well, you'll all go to the devil under him—hi ! look sharp there and let me be off home !"

"Excuse me," I said, approaching him shyly, "but you mentioned Thomas Tomich just now—is it Thomas Opuiskin you mean ? I should so much like—in fact I have reasons for being much interested in this person ; and I am anxious to know how far this man is to be believed when he states that his master Egor Ilitch Rostáneff, intends to make a present of one of his villages to the said Thomas Tomich."

"And allow me, in my turn, to inquire why and how you are interested in 'this person' as you describe him, 'this damned rascal' as I call him ?—and that's how he should be described, not as a *person* ! A nice sort of a *person* his is—he's a walking swindle—not a man !"

I explained that I did not know Thomas personally, but that the colonel was my uncle, and that my own name was Sergey Alexandrovitch.

"What ? the scholar ? why they're waiting for you, my dear sir—you're wanted there !" shouted my friend. "Why, I've just come from there myself. I got up from dinner before I had had my pudding—I couldn't stand Thomas any longer. I quarrelled with everybody about the place through that damnable Thomas. Here's a meeting ! my name's Bachchéef, and I knew you when you were no taller than that. Who'd have thought of meeting you like this ?" and he commenced kissing me, Russian fashion.

After a minute or two I began to question my friend—it was a grand opportunity.

"Who on earth is this Thomas," I asked, "who has set the

whole household by the ears? Why don't they drive him out of the place with whips? I must say—'

"What—~~kick him out~~ you must be mad! Why, the colonel walks on tiptoes before Thomas. The fellow decreed one fine Thursday that the day should be called Wednesday, and everyone of them made a Wednesday out of the Thursday! 'I don't want it to be Thursday!' said Thomas—and so there were two Wednesdays that week! and that's as true as truth can be, and I haven't added *that* much to it!"

"I have heard this, but I confess—"

"Oh, my dear sir, don't trouble yourself to confess—it's all Thomas—law there now, there's nothing to be done. Why, that old woman—the colonel's mother, Mrs. General—she's a great lady of course, and all that—but she's as mad as a March hare; she adores that cursed Thomas. As for your aunt Proskóvia—well, she's a woman, and therefore one respects her; but I've no patience with her 'achs!' and her 'ochs!' The only sensible creature of the lot is Sásha, the colonel's daughter, who is only fifteen, but wiser than the lot of them put together! *She* doesn't flatter Thomas! It does one good to see her! A dear little woman, she is!—flatter Thomas, indeed! Why he used to play the fool and imitate all sorts of animals to amuse the old general; and now Thomas is commander-in-chief himself, and your uncle takes this clown of a fellow, and frames and glazes the black-guard, and worships him on his knees—this recipient of his own charity! *psu!*"

"Well, after all, poverty is no vice—you know; but tell me, is Thomas handsome? is he very clever? is he—"

"What, Thomas? oh—he's a *real* beauty!" said Bachchéef with a look of exquisite contempt on his fat face. My question evidently irritated him and he was beginning to look at me with some disdain. "A *real* beauty! ha, ha! listen, good people, we've found a beauty!—why, my good sir, he's uglier than the ugliest animal, if you wish to know! I'd allow him his wit—if he had any—but he hasn't the wit of a chicken! no, he's simply given them all a dose of some magic physic or other—*psu!* my tongue's tired—I'd rather spit than talk of that fellow, any day!—hang you and your questions, you've irritated me all over again!—hi, there! aren't you ready?"

"The black has to be shod yet, sir," cried some one.

"*I'll* let you have it—you and the black! Well all I can tell you is—you'll open your mouth when you get there, and so you'll

remain with your mouth open ! Why I was taken in by the fellow myself, at first. I respected him—I thought him a tremendous scholar—he doctored me (I am an invalid though I may not look it) ; he gave me some drops and nearly turned me up with my toes to the daisies !—you go and see for yourself—you'll fall in love with him for a certainty. He'll make the poor colonel weep tears of blood yet ! Why, all the friends around cut the family now, for that damnable Thomas's sake ! Not a person can come into the house but is insulted at once. He preaches sermons to everybody he sees—his tongue wags so, that if you were to cut it off and throw it into the dust-hole it would go on talking *there* till some crow happened to come along and eat it up ! The silly fool is teaching the servants French just now—think of that—damned idiot ! What do they want to know French for ? French is all humbug, I say—what's the good of it ? Take a bottle of wine and drink it—and that'll pass you in any language—they all understand that ! psu ! what humbug it is—you know French, I suppose ?

‘ Ta, ta, ta, ta, ta, ta.
The kitten's looking for it's ma ! ’

That's the sort of thing it is ! You're a scholar, aren't you ? ” Bachchœf added, looking disdainfully at me.

“ Well, yes,” I said, “ I have gone in for science ; but I have been merely looking about me of late until I came down here.”

“ And what did you come for, pray ? You'd much better have stayed at home—if you have one ; your learning won't help you much here—nor will your uncle. I became thin among those people in one day—it's all Thomas ! Thomas will kill me some day, he will indeed ! ” (my friend always harked back to this subject as though he could not leave it). “ He says he has suffered for the cause of Right and so everybody must honour him. If the slightest thing goes wrong he jumps up and says he's offended. ‘ Nobody respects me—I am despised for my poverty,’ he whines and goes away to sulk ; and you can't sit down to dinner without him. If you do, he comes and rampages up and down. ‘ Why did you sit down without me ? ’ he says ‘ you see no one respects me at all ! ’ You wouldn't believe what happened to-day ! You must know that to-morrow is ‘ Ili's Day ’ (Elijah's Day)—and therefore little Iliusha's name-day. I had intended to spend the day there, and had brought a present for Iliusha, a lovely German toy. The colonel

wanted to have a jolly day for the occasion ; but Thomas spoiled it all. 'What is all this fuss over Iliusha for ?' he wished to know. 'It shall be *my* name-day too' says he. 'But it's Ilia's day, not Thomas's.' 'I don't care,' he says, 'it's going to be my name-day too !' and would you believe it ? they did not know what to do about it, and whether to congratulate him to-morrow, as though it was his name-day, or not !—for if they don't do it he may be offended ; and if they *do*, he will say they are laughing at him. Are you following me, young man ?'

"Of course I am ; and I assure you I consider your way of expressing yourself so striking that I feel inclined to write it all down."

"Write it down ? what !—when ?" asked my stout friend in some alarm and looking suspiciously at me. "You are deceiving me I can see !"

"What do you mean—deceive ?" I asked.

"Why—you get me to tell you things and then you go and write it all down in some book or magazine to which you contribute." I hastened to reassure him that I would do nothing of the sort ; but he continued to look suspiciously at me.

"Would you tell me," I asked, "whether there is any truth in this report that my uncle intends to marry again ?"

"And why not if he wishes ? there's no harm in *that* !—the mischief is—but I can't tell you all about that question—it's too long. However there are a lot of women collected there just now —like flies to a pot of jam—and goodness knows which he will marry ! I don't mind telling you that your uncle is as sweet on one of them as a Siberian cat—but you'll see that for yourself ! I wish he would marry her, but he daren't, he's afraid of Thomas and his mother. They don't want him to marry the girl, because if he did, Thomas Tomich would have to go—so they are boiling a jolly good kettle of fish—you'll see ! .

"Well, to-day at dinner; Thomas thought he would teach me manners—he hates me—I saw he would have liked to drown me in his tablespoon if he could—the little beast was sitting there looking as sulky as a cat ; suddenly he asked me, 'Why are you so fat ? why are you fat and not thin ?' A nice sort of a question to ask a man ! Well, I answered very quietly and reasonably that God chose to make some men thin and some fat, and that there was no appeal from the will of Providence. I think that was reasonable enough; but 'Oh, no !' says Thomas,

'the thing is that you are too well off; you've got five hundred souls and you do nothing; you do no good to your country; one ought to work, and you do nothing but sit at home and tootle at the harmonium !' I certainly do like playing the harmonium when I am in the dumps, that's true enough ! Well, I answered very reasonably again, 'And how am I to serve, Thomas Tomich? what uniform could I squeeze my fat body into? why, I should burst all the buttons—perhaps in polite society too !'

"Now what was there funny in that? and yet he must needs toss himself about with laughter—and gurgle in French, '*Cochon!*' Well, I bore it for some time, and then I got up and said, 'I'm afraid I made a great mistake about you, Thomas—my virtuous friend!—for I always thought you a properly educated man, and you turn out to be just as much a hog as the rest of us !' so saying I marched out of the room, and got no pudding—they were just helping it round !"

"Excuse me," I said, after hearing this long-winded story through, "but I cannot see my way through this mysterious business; however, I have an idea about it."

"What sort of idea, my good fellow?" asked Bachchéef dubiously.

"Well," I said, a little confused, "it may be all wrong, but this is what I think: perhaps we are all mistaken in Thomas Tomich; perhaps all this strangeness does but cover an original and even gifted nature—who knows? perhaps this nature is warped by suffering, and has turned misanthropical in consequence! Very likely the fact that he was obliged to act the clown for a living has embittered and humiliated him;—just imagine for yourself—a generous, conscientious nature, and forced to play the clown!—and so all this may have made him—well, what he is! After all there *must* be something in the man,—there *must* be some reason why everybody knuckles under to him!"

I know my speech was wandering and very little to the point, and I think this might have been excused on the plea of my youth; but Bachchéef did not excuse it; he glared at me savagely for several minutes, growing as livid as he could become.

"What—you mean Thomas is the sort of man you describe?"

"Yes—but—well, I hardly believe my own theory myself, you know; I am only, as it were, throwing out a suggestion."

"Oh—I see—you're a philosopher!" cried Bachchéef, giving the reins to his indignation. "Very well, go and make friends

with Thomas Tomich ; go and chum with your new-found worthy ! ' Pfu ! I thought you were a sensible man—but I see you are—hi ! is the carriage ready ? home then, quick ! "

It was with the greatest difficulty that I managed to pacify Bachchéef before they got him packed into his carriage ; but at last I succeeded, at all events partially.

" Then I suppose we shall not see you again at my uncle's ? " I asked.

" Of course you will ; why, you don't suppose I've got any strength of will about me, do you ? that's my greatest weakness —there's no *starch* in me ; I can't keep it up. I am sure to turn up again before the week's out, and have another row with Thomas. I believe Thomas was sent by Providence as a punishment for my own particular sins. My nature is that of a woman, my dear boy,—there's no firmness in me—to my grief I say it ! "

We parted good friends, and he invited me to come over and dine with him.

" Come, by all means," he said ; " my ' *Vodki*' is quite tip top, and my cook has been in Paris—I'll give you a good dinner —you'll lick your fingers after it, my good sir, and kiss the cook's feet,—I'd take you with me to-day but I'm not in the mood, I'm all soured and low ;—I'm a wretched invalid, you know, though I may not look it. Well, good-bye—there's your tarantass ready, too ! Tell Thomas he'd better not meet me anywhere just now, or I'll give him such a warm welcome that he—"

I didn't hear his last words as the carriage swept along enveloped in dust ; I sat down in my own trap and drove on.

" Of course that old fellow exaggerates ! " I thought to myself ; but what he said about my uncle struck me very forcibly ; —here were two people agreeing that my uncle loved this girl.

" Am I to marry her or not ? " I wondered ; and I drove on deep in thought.

CHAPTER III.

I CONFESS I began to feel a little less bold. My romantic notions were beginning to look a little strange—not to say silly—as I drove into Stepánczikoff, at about five o'clock in

the afternoon. My road led past the huge garden which I remembered so well from my boyhood, and which I had so often dreamed of while at school ; and I jumped out of my tarantass and walked through the well remembered place towards the wooden dwelling house.

I was anxious to arrive unobserved, so as to be enabled to make inquiries, feel my way a bit, and above all have a chat with uncle before plunging into the family circle ; and in this I was successful. Passing up the avenue of aged limes, I came to the terrace, upon which opened the large glass doors leading into the house—a terrace laid out with beautiful flower-beds and with large pots of exotic shrubs placed here and there all over it.

Here I came across one of the old servants—old Gavril who had served my grandfather and was now in some nominal position under my uncle. The old fellow had spectacles on and was reading out of a copy-book with engrossed attention ; I had seen him a couple of years ago in St. Petersburg whither he came up with my uncle, so that he recognised me at once, and fell to kissing my hands with tears of joy rolling down his cheeks, while his spectacles slipped off his nose and fell on the ground ; his affection touched me deeply.

Remembering my conversation with Bachchéef, I began my course of inquiry by asking what the copy-book which Gavril held was for—it looked suspiciously like a confirmation of Bachchéef's words.

"What—you don't mean to say they've begun to teach you French, Gavril ?" I asked.

"Yes, sir," he said sorrowfully, "they are trying to make a poll-parrot jackass of me in my old age."

"Does Thomas teach you himself ?"

"Yes—oh ! he's a very clever gentleman, he is !"

"How does he teach you ? let's see the book. Ah ! French words in Russian letters—so I supposed ! Gavril, how can you give yourself into the hands of such a fool, such an *ass* as this man ? aren't you ashamed of yourself ?" I cried--forgetting in one moment all the high-minded allowances and arguments I had been using to Bachchéef in Thomas's favour, and which had made the former so angry.

"Why, sir, how can he be a fool when he has all the gentle-folks in there by the nose ?"

"Hm ! perhaps you're right, Gavril !" I said, thoughtfully ;

there was a smack of truth in his remark—"however, take me to my uncle," I added.

"But I daren't—I daren't show my face!" the old fellow cried piteously. "I am even afraid of the colonel nowadays! I walk about here among the flower-beds and hide if he comes by."

"Why, what on earth are you afraid of?"

"I didn't know my lessons, a little while ago—so Thomas Tomich told me to go down on my knees and I wouldn't—I'm too old for that sort of thing now, Sergey Alexandrovitch; and the colonel was angry with me for not obeying Thomas Tomich. 'He's trying to do you a service—he's taking trouble in order to teach you French pronunciation,' says the colonel. So I'm working away at the vocabulary now. Thomas Tomich wants to examine me again this evening."

"One question, Gavril—what sort of a man is Thomas to look at? is he good-looking and tall and—"

"What, Thomas Tomich? no, sir, he's a nasty scurvy-looking little beast as ever was!"

"Well, keep your pecker up, Gavril," I said. "I daresay all this sort of thing will be changed before very long; in fact I give you my word there shall be a change for the better. Now then, where's Uncle?"

"He's receiving a deputation of moujiks, behind the stables. They've come from Capuitonova with the head men; they've heard that Thomas Tomich is to have Capuitonova made over to him and they are come to beg off."

"But why behind the stables?"

"The colonel's afraid . . .!"

Sure enough I found my uncle behind the stables; he was standing before a group of moujiks who were bowing and cringing to him and were evidently much in earnest over some petition; my uncle was apparently reassuring them with warmth. I called him—he turned sharp round and fell on my neck.

He was delighted to see me—his joy almost amounted to ecstasy; he embraced me and pressed my hands again and again; it was as though I were his son just saved from some deadly peril; it was as if I had saved him, too, from some mortal danger, and had brought him a solution of all his difficulties and anxieties, and peace and happiness both to himself and all he loved. After the first transport of joy the dear old fellow burst out laughing and could not stop himself; he overwhelmed

me with questions and was for taking me straight away to the family,—but stopped to introduce me to his Capuitonova peasants; then, without rhyme or reason he commenced to tell me all about some scientific friend, Korofskin, whom he had met out walking and who was coming to see us; then he dropped Korofskin and began about something else. I looked at him with satisfaction.

In reply to some of his questions, I told him that I would rather not enter the civil service, but go on with my scientific pursuits; and no sooner did I mention science than my dear old uncle began to look very learned and important. I told him that of late I had been going in for mineralogy, which communication so delighted him that he raised his chin and looked proudly around as though he felt the whole world was gazing in admiration of our scientific knowledge. My uncle, as I have said, had the most mighty respect for science, of which he knew absolutely nothing himself.

"Eh! my boy!" he cried, ecstatically, "there are men who know every little secret of nature's treasury. One sits among them and listens and feels that one knows nothing oneself and yet one likes to listen. Now here am I—I am content to steam along the railway—but my little fellow Iliusha, he'll probably fly up in the air, in his day—depend upon it he will—all this is science—you know! Wait a bit, my boy—I'll introduce you to a man of science—*such* a man. . . ."

"What! Thomas Tomich do you mean?" I asked.

"No, no—not Thomas—he is a highly scientific man, too, of course; but I meant Korofskin!" and my uncle blushed and appeared to be confused at the mention of Thomas's name.

Meanwhile the moujiks were staring at us, blinking their eyes and opening their mouths as we spoke.

"Look here, uncle," I said, "I am interrupting the deputation. What do they want? I confess I suspect something of their object and I should much like to hear what they have to say."

"Yes, yes—I forgot them!" and my uncle began to fuss about. "Look here—what am I to do with them? they've got the idea—I should like to know where they got it from—that I am going to give them all up—all Capuitonova (you remember Capuitonova—we used to drive over there of an evening with my dear Katia when she was alive!)—well, they think I'm going to give them over to Thomas Tomich, and they say they don't want to leave me, and that's all about it!"

"Then it's not true, uncle?" I cried joyfully, "it's not true that you are going to present Thomas with Capuitonova?"

"I never thought of such a thing. I must have said something of the sort—for a joke, I suppose, and this is the result. I don't know why they don't seem to like Thomas—I'll introduce you to him directly—*such a man, he is, my boy!*" Uncle looked timidly at me as he said this; I believe he felt that Thomas and I should be enemies from the first.

"We don't wish to be cut adrift from you," shouted the peasants in a chorus. "You are our father and we are your children."

"Listen, uncle," I said, "I do not know Thomas yet; but I have heard a good deal about him; I confess, I met Mr. Bachchée, to-day—and I have my own ideas; let these men go and we'll have a chat privately—to tell you the truth, that's what I am here for."

"Of course, of course," said my uncle hurriedly and confusedly, "I'll let the moujiks go and then we'll have a friendly talk. Now my friends," he added to the men, "go home at once, and when you want anything come straight to me, *straight to me, mind—at all times!*"

"Yes, little father, we will—we are your children; don't you let Thomas Témich come bullying us!" cried the moujiks.

"Oh, you fools! I tell you I won't give you over."

"Because, if you do—he'll be educating us all; they say he's taught all the people about here."

"You don't mean to say he teaches *you* French, too?" I cried.

"Not so far, sir—God has saved us up to now," answered a peasant with a huge bald head and a great long beard which wagged up and down as he spoke. "God has been merciful to us up to now."

"What *does* he teach you?" I asked.

"Well, his teaching amounts to what I call buying a golden box to put a copper farthing in it; his teaching isn't any good to us."

"Don't go on, Sergey," said my uncle, "it's not fair on Thomas—these fools don't understand what he tells them."

"It's all your own fault!" I cried, addressing the moujiks again. "Why can't you tell him outright that what he tells you is all impractical and of no use to you? where are your tongues?"

"The other day he came into a barn where we were," said another man, "and asked us whether we knew how many miles off the sun was. 'How are we to know? science isn't for the like of us, it's for gentlemen,' I said. 'No, you fool, it isn't,' says he, 'because you *are* a fool and don't know your own good; but I'm an Astroloom and know all about God's firmament.'"

"Well, and how many miles was it to the sun?" asked my uncle, cheering up and giving me a wink.

"Oh—he said some long distance or other," replied the moujik, who evidently did not expect the question.

"Yes, but *how* far,—what did he tell you? go on."

"Oh, some hundred miles, I think; it was a long way, anyhow; I know I reckoned that I shouldn't do it in three days with a cart and pair."

"Well, there you are, you see—that's knowledge; now this very earth that we are on is like a ball floating about in the air;" my uncle illustrated this natural phenomenon with his two hands made into a sphere; the moujiks laughed.

"It is though," he continued; "it floats by itself in the air and goes round the sun. The sun stands in one place and doesn't move; you only think it moves, but *it* doesn't. There, what do you think of that? and all this was discovered by Captain Cook the navigator—devil knows who discovered it," he added to me in a whisper, "I think I've told them wrong—I know nothing whatever about it, really. How many miles is it to the sun—do you know?"

"Yes, uncle," I said, "I know; but this is what I think—of course ignorance is most undesirable, and slovenly—but don't you think that to teach peasants astronomy is—"

"Of course, of course!" cried my uncle, "ignorance is slovenliness; so it is—I have always said so—at least I've thought it if I haven't said it;" uncle evidently liked the expression. "Listen, you fellows—ignorance is slovenliness, all dirt and misery, and that's why Thomas Tomich wants to teach you; he is anxious for your good—education is just as good as any other work, it gives a man rank and position—well, be off now, my good fellows! I'm glad to have seen you, and you needn't be afraid, I shall not give you over."

"Be our protector, father, and the light of our eyes," and the moujiks abased themselves and touched the ground with their foreheads.

"Come, come—you may bend to God and the Emperor, but you need not do it to me; be off now and behave yourselves. You know," he said, turning to me as soon as the men were gone, "it's a good thing to cultivate these fellows. Were you amused by my teaching them astronomy? That was only just for fun, old fellow, I was so happy about your arrival, that's all. Did you see the fellow open his mouth when I asked him about the sun? It did one good to look at him. But look here, my dear fellow, don't tell them up there in the drawing-room about all this. I received them behind the stables on purpose so that they should not be seen. It's rather a delicate matter, you see; they came here on the sly, more or less, and I had to—well I indulged them—more for their sakes, of course, than my own."

"Well, here I am at last, uncle," I said, changing the subject—I wanted to get to business—"and I confess your letter so surprised me that I—"

"My boy—not a word about that," he said, apparently much alarmed and lowering his voice: "afterwards, afterwards it shall all be cleared up. I daresay I am very much to blame, before you, but—"

"Before *me*, uncle? why?"

"Afterwards, afterwards, you shall know all afterwards! But what a fine fellow you've grown, Sergey! and how glad I am to see you, my dear boy! I want to show you off—you are the learned one of the family!—but look here, I must tell you they are all very angry with you—so take care what you do and be on your guard."

"Angry?" I cried, gazing at uncle with astonishment—I could not understand why people who had never so much as seen me should be angry with me—"Angry with *me*, uncle?"

"Yes, ~~yes~~ my boy, Thomas is, a little; and mamma too. Of course I don't defend them—Thomas is certainly—well, he has faults, of course, and at this very moment he—Oh, Sergey! you don't know how it all worries me, and if only things could be resettled and made comfortable, how happy we all might be. However, every one has faults—you and I are not perfect, either."

"Yes, but think, my dear uncle—think what things the fellow does!"

"Oh, but it's nothing at all, my dear boy—there's nothing in it; why, what do you suppose he is angry with me about, just now? However, I daresay it's my fault;—I'll tell you another time."

"Well, I'll just tell you my idea, uncle," I said—I was anxious to have my say—"in the first place we must remember that he has been a kind of professional fool; this may have embittered the man, humiliated him and dashed his ideal of manhood to the ground; consequently his nature has become warped and stunted and revengeful towards mankind in general. Now if this man could only be made to sign a truce with humanity, and—so to speak—be brought to his senses again, he might—".

"Just so, just so," cried my uncle in ecstacy, "exactly that; it's a noble thought. Why it would be a shame—it would be most ungenerous to condemn a man like him; of course, dear boy, you understand me—you've brought me happiness; if only things could be made a little more comfortable over in the house; you know I'm afraid of showing my face there just now—I shall catch it for your coming down."

"Oh, if that's the case, uncle—" I began, embarrassed.

"Not a bit of it—no, no," he cried, "you're my guest and I'm going to have my way this time."

All this was very surprising to me.

"Now look here, uncle," I said firmly, "I want to know first, what have you had me down here for? next, what you want me to do? and lastly, why are you in any way to blame in my eyes? what did you mean by that speech?"

"Dear fellow, don't ask me," he said; "you shall know all by-and-bye. I daresay I am very much to blame;—but I wished to do what I thought the right thing and—and—you'll marry her—you'll marry her if there's a spark of generosity about you," he added, flushing up as though with some sudden feeling, and pressing my hand with a sort of ecstacy in his face. "But enough—you shall know all in good time; above all, make a good impression in there—everything depends on yourself—don't go and be shy—make a good start."

"But, look here, uncle!" I said, "whom have you got here? for, I confess, I have been so little in society, that I—"

"What, you're a little frightened—eh?" said my uncle, smiling; "oh, no! it's all right—no one but our own party! don't funk, that's the chief thing. I'm rather nervous about you—I want you to make an impression; well—there's just mamma—you remember mamma? the best and most generous hearted of old ladies! not a scrap of pretension about her—, old fashioned a little; but all the better for that. She has

fancies sometimes—for instance, she's very angry with me just now—my fault, of course—all my fault, I admit that. Then there's Miss Pereplitsin; well, she's—I don't know, of late she's been rather—it's her nature, I suppose, we mustn't condemn people!—and you mustn't suppose she's a mere hanger-on, oh, dear, no! She's a major's daughter, and a great friend and companion of mamma's. Then there's your aunt Proskóvia—we needn't say much about her—she's a fussy old lady, rather, but a dear good soul—she's an old maid at present; but that old rascal Bachchéef, you know,—he's got his eye on her; I think something will come of it. I don't say a word about it, though—it's a secret! Let's see, who else is there?—there are the chicks—you'll see them for yourself;—it's Iliusha's name-day to-morrow. Then—I nearly forgot him!—there's your cousin Misinchikoff—he has been staying here about a month; he was a lieutenant in the hussars, but he's left them; quite a young man, and a good sort of fellow, but—ruined!—goodness knows how he has managed to come to such grief—he has debts; and at present he is staying with me. He invited himself—a nice, quiet young fellow as ever was—nobody ever hears him say a word. Thomas calls him the silent unknown,—he doesn't mind. Thomas is quite pleased with him, for he never contradicts him, or says anything unpleasant. Then there are some town friends, Paul Obnoskin and his mother,—he's a fine, determined young fellow, of very high moral character; and, last of all, we have another visitor—one Tatiana Ivanovna, a distant cousin, I believe,—not quite young—but very charming—and rich, my dear fellow!—she could buy up Stepánchikoff twice over. She has only lately come into her property, and had had a miserable time of it up to then. You must take care what you're about with her, by-the-by; for she's just a little—don't you know—not quite all there! but you won't mind what she says—you're a sensible fellow, I know. You see, she sometimes puts the wrong word—not exactly *fib*s, you know, but simply just so, in the goodness of her heart, don't you know—well, she says what isn't quite the truth—you understand?"

It appeared to me that my worthy uncle was considerably confused. "Listen to me, unclc," I said, "I am so fond of you, dear uncle, that you must excuse my asking you one question—tell me candidly—do you intend to marry a certain lady down here, or not?"

"Who has been telling you anything about it?" said my uncle, blushing like a child. "I'll tell you all there is to tell—firstly, I am not going to marry. Mamma, and Proškóvia, and chiefly Thomas Tomich—whom mother respects and loves, and very properly, for he has done a great deal for her—they all wish me to marry this same Tatiana Ivanovna, for the benefit of the family, in general. Of course they wish me well; too, there's no doubt about it; but I will *not* marry her, I have promised myself that. In spite of my promise to myself, though, I did not give them a decided answer, and they think I mean to agree to their suggestion, and expect me to propose to her to-morrow, on Iliusha's name-day; so that, to-morrow, there'll be the deuce to pay, and I don't know which way to turn. I confess, I was waiting for you and Koroskin, impatiently—I hope to play you both off against them."

"Why, what good can Koroskin do?" I asked.

"Oh—he'll help—he'll help—he's the sort of man who can, and will; you should hear him talk! and, I confess, I expected great things of you too—I want you to argue it out with them. I know I have been selfish and all that—but surely I may be forgiven *some* day? Oh dear—we were so happy before—you should see my Sáša—she's grown so—such a pretty girl, and very nearly old enough to be married—and Iliusha too!"

"Come, uncle," I said, "where's my bag? I'll dress and come down at once."

"Up at the top, my boy, in the front wing—you'll find it all ready; yes, go and change your coat—that's right, and then come down, and I'll prepare them all as well as I can while you're away. They're at tea now—we always have tea early—Thomas likes it as soon as he wakes up after his nap;—so be quick, old fellow, don't leave me unsupported longer than you can help; and, look here, one more thing—don't turn round and shout at me there, as you did just now. If you want to say anything to me, say it afterwards—don't pitch into me there,—I get quite enough of it, you know; they are all so cross."

"Oh, uncle!" I said, "from all I see and hear, I'm afraid you are—"

"What? a duffer? don't mind saying it out, my boy. I know it myself—but what's to be done? So you'll come as soon as ever you can, *mind* you do, now!"

I went upstairs, and unpacked my bag as quickly as I could. While dressing, I thought to myself how very little I had found out about things in general in spite of my whole hour's conversation with my uncle. However, one thing appeared to be quite clear—my uncle still insisted on my marrying; therefore all the inconsistent reports as to his being in love with the same girl must be unfounded. I remember that this reflection threw me into great agitation; it seemed to me, that by my arrival, and by my silence in response to his remark about it, I had given my consent to the union he proposed. "How easy it is," I thought, "to say the word which binds one hand and foot for eternity! and I haven't set eyes on the young woman yet!" And then again, why this enmity of the whole family towards me? And why did uncle play such a very strange part in his own house? What is the object of all this secrecy of his? Why all this timidity and worry? it all seemed so downright absurd to me! On contact with the reality, all my fond romantic notions vanished into the air. I felt—after having a chat with my uncle—that no one in the world but himself could possibly be placed in such a ridiculous position as he was, or could have made me such a proposition as he had made. It struck me, too, that in coming down post haste in response to such a proposal I had been a dreadful fool.

I dressed as fast as I could; and so agitated was I by my thoughts, that at first I did not notice the valet who stood by assisting me to put my clothes on.

"Will you put on the Adelaide-coloured tie, sir, or this spotted one?" asked the man, suddenly.

I looked at him, and it immediately struck me that here was another curious individual; he was well dressed in a brown frock coat, white trousers, and pale yellow waistcoat, patent leather shoes, and a pink necktie; he was evidently an exquisite in his own line; he smelt strongly of scent, and was apparently overwhelmed with a sense of his own dignity.

"Oh! so that tie is Adelaide-coloured, is it?" I asked severely.

"Certainly, sir," he replied, with undisturbed composure.

"And is there an Agrafena-colour?"

"Oh, no, sir; there could not be."

"And why not, pray?"

"It would not be correct taste, sir; you see Adelaide is, at least, a foreign name, a dignified name;—but as for

Agrafena, why, any dirty Russian peasant child may be called that."

"Are you absolutely an idiot, may I ask?"

"Oh dear no! not at all, sir!—of course you are at liberty to form what conclusions you please as to my ~~wits~~; but I may inform you that several generals, and even one or two counts, have been much pleased with my style of conversation."

"And what do they call you?"

"Vidoplassoff."

"Oh! you're Vidoplassoff, are you? I've heard of you—Well, my man, I shall know more of you by-and-by."

"Good heavens!" I thought, as I went down, "what a Bedlam I've got into!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE tea room was the same which opened out on to the terrace—where I had met Gavril a little while before. My uncle's mysterious predictions as to the reception awaiting me disconcerted me not a little. I am, being a youth, more or less self-conceited, and for this reason it was particularly unpleasant to my feelings that no sooner did I enter the room and catch sight of the whole party sitting round the table, having tea, than my foot happened to trip in the carpet and I flew headlong into the middle of the room. Confused and wretched to such a degree that I might—to look at me—have ruined my whole future career, my honour, and my good name by this accident, I stood still and blushed as red as a lobster, looking feebly around the while.

I remembered this incident—unimportant in itself, because of its influence upon my own state of mind during the whole of the day, and also upon my future relations towards some of the persons to be treated of in this story. I tried to make a courteous bow to the assembled company, but failed miserably; after which I rushed up to my uncle and seized his hand vigorously.

"How d'ye do uncle?" I cried.

Now I had meant to say something quite different—some

thing witty—and the above words slipped out entirely unexpectedly.

"How are you—how are you?" replied my uncle, who was suffering on account of my discomfiture just as much as I was. "But we've said that before, my dear boy: don't look so confused," he added in a whisper to me, "anybody might trip like that. I've seen people take a header into a room much less gracefully than you did it. Now then, mamma," he went on in a louder voice, "let me introduce this young man to you—he is a little confused at this moment, but I'm sure you will love him dearly. This is my nephew, Sergey Alexandrovitch," he added to the company in general.

But before I go on with my story, allow me, dear readers, to introduce by name all those members of the family party among whom I found myself at this moment. I must do this for the purpose of my tale.

The company consisted of several ladies and only two men, not counting my uncle and myself.

Thomas Tomich—whom I so much wished to see, and who I felt already must be the all powerful centre of the family—was not in the room; he shone by his absence and had, as it were, taken away all light from the room in his own person. All present were looking morose and preoccupied—one could see that much at a glance. Confused and wretched as I was at that moment, I could still observe that my uncle, for instance, was almost as disturbed as I was myself, though he was doing his very utmost to conceal the fact. There was evidently a weight of some kind on his heart.

One of the two men present was quite a young fellow of about twenty-five years old—that same Obnoskin of whom my uncle had made mention as a sage and virtuous youth.

This young gentleman made a very bad impression upon me; he seemed to have devoted his whole energy to the imitation of a fashionable man about town, but with poor results. His dress, in spite of its pretension to fashion, looked worn and seedy; his face, too, seemed, like his clothes, the worse for wear. He was forever blinking and trying to look sarcastic, and continually put his eyeglass on to stare at me; but when I turned round and stared back at him, he dropped his glass.

The other man present—a young fellow of about twenty-eight—was my cousin Misinchikoff. He seemed a very quiet

personage indeed. At tea he did not say a word, nor did he smile or show any signs of life. But I certainly did not observe that subdued appearance which my uncle had told me of; on the contrary, I thought his face expressed the greatest resolution and character. Misinchikoff was a dark-haired, handsome, sun-burnt-looking fellow and was very well dressed—at my uncle's expense as I afterwards found. As for the ladies, the first I noticed was Miss Pereplitsin—thanks to her unusually wicked, sly face which was of a ghastly pallor. She was seated alongside of Mrs. General—but a little behind her out of courtesy; every other minute she would bend forward and whisper something into that lady's ear.

Two or three old hangers-on, poor relations and so on, sat in a row, perfectly silent and waiting deferentially for their tea, with eyes fixed on Mrs. General.

A fat little lady of about fifty years old, dressed very tastelessly and "loud," interested me very much.

She seemed to be highly painted and to have a very wretched set of teeth, a collection of sad-looking stumps doing duty for a better supply. For all that, she smiled and blinked and coquettled, and even made eyes in a manner worthy of more transcendent charms. She was covered with large gold chains, and was continually taking stock of me through her *pince-nez* eye-glasses, just as Obnoskin did—whose mother she was. My aunt, the humble Proskovia Ilinishna, poured out tea. She was evidently anxious to embrace and cry over me after our long separation, but she did not dare, for everyone and everything in this place seemed to be under the influence of some damping influence.

Next to the last named, sat a dear little black-eyed, pretty girl of fifteen summers, who stared at me with great curiosity—this was my cousin Sásha.

Lastly,—but perhaps more conspicuous than anyone else in the room,—there sat a strange looking lady dressed most sumptuously, but in far too juvenile a manner; she was by no means in the first flush of youth—being some thirty-five years of age, at least. Her face was very thin and pale and had a dried-up look about it, but was decidedly animated for all that. She blushed at every word, almost, and every motion brought the colour to her cheeks. She seemed always on the move, jumping up or twisting about on her chair; so that it appeared impossible for her to be still for a moment. She examined me

with a sort of hungry curiosity, and perpetually leaned over to Sásha or some other neighbour to whisper in her ear, after which she would laugh aloud in an absolutely simple and unaffected—even childish—manner. Her eccentricities did not seem to draw the slightest attention to her—as though all present had agreed to let her pass as under a special license—which fact surprised me much.

I guessed that this must be that Tatiana Ivanovna, whom my uncle described to me, and who had been fastened upon him, by Mrs. General & Co., as his future wife. The whole company treated this personage with much deference, in consideration of her wealth. I liked her kind blue eyes, in spite of the wrinkles round them; their expression was so simple and benign and so merry, that it did one good to look at them. Of this Tatiana Ivanovna, who is destined to play a great part in my narrative, I will say more later on; her history was a most interesting one.

Five minutes after my arrival, a jolly little boy came in from the garden—my cousin Iliusha—whose name-day was to be celebrated to-morrow.

With the boy, there entered a young girl with a pretty figure, and a face which though pale and tired-looking was still very beautiful. She glanced round the room timidly and distrustfully, looked intently at me and then sat down next to Tatiana Ivanovna.

I remember my heart involuntarily beat quicker—this must be the governess, I thought. I remember, also, that my uncle, as soon as she came in, glanced hastily at me and flushed up to his hair; and that he immediately stooped to pick up Iliusha and brought him to me to be kissed. I also observed that Mrs. Obnoskin first stared fixedly at my uncle and then sarcastically raised her ~~her~~ glass and brought it to bear on the governess. My uncle was very much disconcerted by this movement on her part, and to hide his confusion, called Sásha up to make my acquaintance; but Sásha only rose and curtsied politely to me, without saying a word. This suited the dignified little woman very well; I liked it.

At this moment my kind old aunt Proskóvia determined to desert her post at the tea-urn and came up to hug me and have a little chat; but I had hardly had time to say a couple of words when the whining voice of Miss Pereplitsin broke in upon us with the information that “evidently Proskóvia Ilinishna

has forgotten her poor mamma" (Mrs. General), "for mamma asked for a cup of tea, and you don't pour it out for her, and she's waiting!" and my poor aunt had to drop me and rush off to her duties again.

This Mrs. General was the head and chief of the family circle—and before her everyone walked in terror. She was a lean, disagreeable, old woman, dressed in mourning, whose wits were warped with age; she was mischievous and arrogant and silly. When she was in her disagreeable vein, the whole household lived in purgatory. This amiable old lady had two ways of making herself unpleasant at such times; the first was her silent system; she would be silent for days together, never opening her lips and pushing away or throwing down everything that was put before her. The other manner peculiar to the old lady, in times of wrath, was a system of eloquence; during which the household was treated first to an exhibition of extreme dejection followed by the enumeration of various terrible events to happen in and out of the family, including the end of the world, poverty, and so on; all of which might have been averted, according to Mrs. General, had she been allowed to speak—or had she been listened to in time. Needless to say, her little flock of hangers-on agreed entirely with Mrs. General on these and all other points, and that her views were invariably supported and confirmed by the great Tom Tomich. On this occasion—at the time of my arrival, I mean—Mrs. General (who was my grandmother of course) was evidently in the midst of one of her moods of irritability; she was employing the silent method; and all the family were on tenter hooks, all except old Tatiana Ivanovna, who did not count for an ordinary being—she was in excellent spirits.

My uncle now solemnly advanced to present me to my grandmother; the latter made a face and pushed her cup of tea away.

"Is this that gymnast-man?" she asked—drawling the words and addressing the Pereplitsin.

This stupid question quite finished me off. I don't know why she called me a gymnast-man,—but I learned afterwards that she was in the habit of making this kind of senseless observation.

Pereplitsin leaned towards Mrs. General and whispered something in her ear, but my grandmother only made a gesture of disgust and said nothing. I stood with open mouth and looked inquiringly at my uncle—everyone was staring at me,

and Obnoskin grinned and showed his teeth in a manner which did not please me at all.

"My dear boy, you mustn't mind," my uncle whispered, "she talks a little wildly occasionally, but it's all from pure goodness of heart—the heart is what we must look at!"

Tatiana Ivanovna, who had never taken her eyes off me, caught the last word.

"Yes, the heart—the heart," she began, but did not finish what she wished to say; she blushed and said something in a low tone to the governess—after which she put her handkerchief to her mouth and roared with laughter, in a hysterical way, leaning back in her chair. I looked round the room in the greatest astonishment, but no one seemed to be in the least degree surprised—and I came to the conclusion that poor Tatiana was crazy.

Soon after this they gave me a cup of tea, which put me a little more at my ease; and I suddenly determined—I don't know why—to make a desperate attempt to be agreeable to the ladies, and began :

"You were quite right, uncle, when you warned me that I might be bashful. I admit—why should I conceal the fact?—that up to this moment I have been quite unused to ladies' society" (this last remark was addressed to Mrs. Obnoskin with one of my sweetest smiles); "and just now especially, I think I was justified in feeling some shyness, coming bounding in as I did. It reminded me of that book 'Clumsy People'—have you read 'Clumsy People?'" I asked, becoming more and more confused as I went on and blushing under the supercilious stare of Obnoskin, who continued to examine me from head to foot, while making a considerable display of his white teeth.

"Oh, my dear fellow," said my uncle, delighted that the ice was broken and that I had found my tongue at last, somehow—"oh, yes, that's nothing at all, bashfulness is nothing—you're shy and there's an end of the matter. Why I—dear boy—when I made my debut into ladies' society—I was so deadly shy that I told a most awful lie before I knew where I was; it was like this—and gospel truth I assure you—well, I had just got my commission and went to Moscow. I had a letter of introduction to some great lady there—that is, she was as kind a woman as you could find, but a little arrogant. I went to call on her—she received me. The drawing-room

was full—mostly of big-wigs ; I made my bow and sat down. Well, almost her first question was, had I any landed property ? What was I to say ? I hadn't so much as a chicken of my own. Everybody was looking at me—wretched little 'Sub' that I was—how I blushed ! Well now, why didn't I say that I had nothing ?—all would have been well and I should have told the truth ; however, I couldn't do it. 'Oh, yes,' I told them, 'I've got a hundred and seventeen souls.' Why did I stick in the odd seventeen ? why didn't I lie properly while I was about it ? However, the next minute my note of introduction had proved me a liar and showed that I hadn't a stick or a stone of my own. What was to be done ? I got up and bolted, and never went near the house again. At that time I had not got this place with its three hundred and Capuitonova with over two hundred—more than five hundred souls altogether ; however, I have never lied since then, and never shall again."

"Oh, in your place I should not have any insuperable objections to lying—who knows what may not happen ?" remarked Obnoskin, with a nasty smile.

"Of course, God only knows what will happen," replied my uncle simply.

Obnoskin lay back and roared with laughter ; his mother smiled too ; Miss Pereplitsin joined in with a most disagreeable giggle ; Tatiana burst out laughing also, without knowing why, and clapped her hands. (I could see very plainly that my poor uncle went for nothing in his own house.) Sáša's eyes sparkled angrily as she darted a look at Obnoskin ; the governess blushed and hung her head—and my uncle looked about him surprised at the laughter which had greeted his last words.

"What is it ? what's happened ?" he asked, gazing blankly at each of us. All this time my cousin Misinchikoff sat grave and preoccupied ; he did not smile when the others laughed, but continued to sip his tea in a thoughtful manner, occasionally looking philosophically around ; and then, as though over-powered with dulness, commencing to whistle softly to himself—always stopping before this lapse of manners was observed, however.

Obnoskin, it appeared to me, though not averse to provoking my uncle and myself, was afraid of looking at Misinchikoff for some reason or other. I also observed that my silent cousin occasionally examined me, and appeared to be anxious to determine what manner of man I was.

"I feel sure," said Mrs. Obnoskin, "I am sure, Mr. Sergey, that you were a very poor ladies' man in St. Petersburg. I have heard that there are a great many youths there, in these days, who eschew ladies' society altogether. I think it very wrong—simply a form of unpardonable free-thinking—that's how I look at it—and, I admit, I am astonished at you, young man, astonished! I am indeed!"

"Indeed—I have never been in society at all," I cried with animation, "but I think, I hope—you see, I have always lived alone up to now—I hope now—"

"He has been too busy with his scientific studies," remarked my uncle.

"Oh, uncle—how you do harp upon science. Fancy," I continued with a pleasant smile, addressing Mrs. Obnoskin, "fancy my dear uncle is so devoted to science that he has raked up some wonderful philosophizing gentleman on the high-road, Mr. Korofskin; and his first word to me to-day, after all these years of absefice, was, that he was expecting this phenomenal gentleman and expecting him with the greatest impatience—all for the love of science, of course!" and I laughed freely in the hope of raising a sympathizing smile among the auditors of my humorous observation.

"Who's that? what's he talking about?" asked Mrs. General in an icy tone of Miss Pereplitsin.

"Egor Ilitch has invitcd some guests,—some learned people—he has been up and down the high-road, beating them up," replied Pereplitsin, with satisfaction and great unction.

Poor uncle was quite confused.

"Yes," he hastened to explain—looking reproachfully at me—"I expect Korofskin, a man of science—a man whose fame will last for ever—" here poor uncle stuck. Mrs. General made a gesture of displeasure; but with so much vigour this time that she brushed her tea-cup off the table and it flew to the other side of the room—smashing to atoms on the floor.

General agitation followed. My uncle whispered to me excitedly, "She always throws something down when she's angry—don't look at her, pretend you don't see—it only happens when she's angry—why did you mention Korofkin?"

At this moment I caught sight of the governess: she was looking at me with an expression of reproach and almost contempt, and her pale cheeks were flushed with anger. I under-

stood her look ; it meant that by my feeble wish to make a humorous remark at uncle's expense—in order to cover my own absurd *entrée*—I had forfeited much of this girl's good opinion. I cannot say how ashamed I felt.

" Do tell me something about St. Petersburg," began Mrs. Obnoskin once more, when the agitation following upon the broken cup had subsided ; " tell me something about that dear delightful place—oh ! how I remember our life in that most charming of capitals—don't you, Paul ?—and that dear general and his wife, the Polovitsins. Oh, the *beau monde* of the place—I daresay you have met our friends ;—I have been longing to see you in order to hear all about them—"

" Very sorry," I replied, " but as I said before, I know nothing of St. Petersburg society, and General Polovitsin—I never heard of him ! " My desire to be agreeable was changing into a feeling of annoyance.

" He was too busy with his mineralogy," said my incorrigible uncle, proudly ; " that means examining stones of all sorts, doesn't it ? "

" Well—" I began.

" Ah ! yes—there are a great many branches of science and they are all useful ; to tell you the truth, I was not very clear what mineralogy was ! I don't mind ordinary subjects, but I'm very stupid at all sciences, I confess ! "

" Oh, you confess that, do you ? " said Obnoskin, laughing rudely.

" Father, don't ! " cried Sásha.

" What, darling ? Oh—I beg your pardon—I was interrupting you," he added to Mrs. Obnoskin, not comprehending Sásha's exclamation.

" Oh, don't apologize, pray ! " remarked Mrs. Obnoskin, coldly, " I was only going to add, Mr. Sergey, that you must learn the error of your ways ; science and lofty ideas and so on are all very well and have their attractive side, but they cannot take the place of woman ; no, no, young man, women form the character—you cannot get on without women, young man, impossible, im—possible ! "

" Yes, impossible, impossible ! " cried Tatiana, breaking into the conversation with childish eagerness, and blushing of course. " Now listen," she continued, " I want to ask you something."

" What is it ? " I inquired, looking attentively at her.

"I wanted to ask you—are you going to stay here long?"

"I really don't know, it depends upon my business."

"His business! what business can he have here—silly man?" and Tatiana, blushing to a fearful degree and hiding her face with her fan, leaned over to the governess and again whispered something in her ear. Then she suddenly burst out laughing and clapped her hands.

"Wait, wait!" she cried, tearing herself away from her confidante and turning towards me again; "listen to what I want to say to you. You are so, *so* like a young man I saw—a most charming young man; do you remember, Sásha and Nastia? He's just like that silly man—you remember?—we were driving in the carriage and he was riding—with a white waistcoat on, and he looked at me with his eyeglass—shameful man! Don't you remember? I hid my face with my fan and then jumped out of the carriage and called out, 'You're an impudent fellow!' and then I threw him my bouquet; don't you remember, Nastia?" And the half crazy girl, in great agitation, covered her face with her hands; then suddenly jumped up, ran to the window, picked a rose from a plant there, threw it down near me on the floor, and rushed out of the room.

This time her eccentric conduct made some sensation, though Mrs. General was not moved by it any more than before. However, Mrs. Obnoskin, though not surprised, appeared to be considerably embarrassed and looked anxiously at her son; the young ladies flushed; while Paul Obnoskin, with a show of annoyance which I did not then understand, rose from his chair and walked to the window. My uncle was about to explain something to me by telegraphic signals, when a new arrival distracted his attention.

"Oh!" he cried, evidently sincerely delighted, "here comes Evgraf Larionitch. Well, old fellow, where have you turned up from?"

Well, I thought, this *is* a collection of originals. I could not see my way through the mysterious meaning of the things which I had witnessed among this museum of curiosities, as yet; nor did I suspect that I was a very fair specimen of a curiosity myself at this time.

CHAPTER V.

HERE entered, or rather, I should say, squeezed into the room a figure which had begun to bow and scrape and smile before it hove in view, and which inspected the occupants of the room with the greatest curiosity. It was a little freckled old man, bald, with cunning twinkling eyes and a kind of indescribably merry smile on his face. He wore an old dress coat, evidently made for somebody else; one of the buttons hung down on a thread and three others were wanting; a pair of old torn boots and a greasy-looking cap formed a harmonious finish to his melancholy costume. He held a dirty-looking cotton handkerchief in his hand and wiped his forehead with it. I observed that the governess blushed slightly and glanced at me with a defiant expression.

"Straight from town, dear friend, as straight as I could come; you shall hear all about it—but first let me report myself," so saying, the old fellow advanced towards Mrs. General. However he stopped half-way, and addressed my uncle again.

"You know my little failing, sir? I'm a blackguard, a real blackguard; but let me get to the lady of the house before I say a word to anyone else—let me reach her footstool and claim her protection and goodness before I let my eyes see another person. Allow me, madame, allow me, your excellency—allow me to approach and kiss the edge of your dress, for I should soil your noble lovely fingers with my lips."

Mrs. General, to my astonishment, gave her hand with great condescension.

"And you—lily of the household—most beautiful lady," he went on, turning to Miss Pereplitsin, "what am I to do, dear lady, I am a hopeless blackguard; you see I was voted a blackguard in 1841—they gave my friend Valentin Ignátič an accessorialship and voted me a blackguard; so what was to be done? I tried to be an honest fellow, but I find it won't do. And you, Miss Sashenka, our sweet little apple, may I kiss the hem of your frock? Master Name-day-boy, my respects! I've brought you a bow and arrows—I've been making it all the morning—the children and I. We'll try it afterwards, and when you are a big man you shall cut a real Turk's head off. Pros-kóvia Ilinishna, I can't get round to you, or I should not only

kiss your hand but your foot as well. Madame Obnoskin, our servant ! I have prayed for you and your son this very day, that he may be gifted with all good things and talents, especially talents. Mr. Misinchikoff, greeting to you too, sir, and all blessings ! Heaven send you all you want—if it can find out what that is—but you are so silent there's no knowing. Good evening, Nastia ; the small fry all send you their love—they think of you every day. And now, lord of the manor, greeting to you too ! Yes, my lord—straight from town—as straight as I could come. This is your nephew, I suppose—the learned young man ? Sir, I salute you, your hand !”

Everybody laughed at the old fellow ; he was evidently a sort of amateur fool of the family ; however, his coming cheered the company wonderfully. Most of those present did not see the point of his sarcasms, and yet he had a shot at nearly every one of them. Only the governess—whom to my astonishment he had called ‘ Nastia ’—simply blushed and frowned.

“ Excuse me, Mr.—Mr.—, I never remember your name,” said Obnoskin. “ I’ve long wished to ask you why it is that you always glance back over your shoulder when you enter the room ? it looks so absurd.” (This gentleman apparently had not quite liked the old fellow’s allusion to talents).

“ Simply because I always have a feeling that somebody is coming up behind to squash me like a fly. I’m getting old, and am rather a moromaniac.”

Some of the company laughed, only the governess jumped up and sat down again ; in spite of her blushes one could see that she was much vexed and miserable.

“ Do you know what ? ” my uncle whispered, “ that’s her father.”

I stared at him. “ Why,” I said, “ I thought she was an ~~old maid~~ ”

“ No, no, that’s her father—a really good, honest, old fellow he is too. Fearfully poor—eight children. Nastia keeps them all on her wages. He comes here every week—*proud*, my dear fellow, as Lucifer—I can’t get him to take any money, he won’t borrow, too proud.”

“ Well, Evgraf Larionitch, what’s new up at your place ? ” continued my uncle, giving the old fellow a friendly slap on the shoulder.

“ Oh ! nothing much. Valentin Ignátič has sent in a complaint against Trishin. Trishin delivered a contract lot of

flour to government with a considerable deficit showing ; so Valentín writes a report, and says : ' If Mr. Trishin can't look after his own family (his niece has just bolted with an officer), he can hardly be expected to keep a proper look-out over government property.' He actually put this into his formal report."

" For shame, for shame ! " said Mrs. Obnoskin. " What a naughty story."

" But where's my chief benefactor ? where's Thomas Tomich ? " continued the old fellow. " Isn't he coming to tea ? "

My uncle started as though he had been stung ; he glanced timidly at Mrs. General. " I really don't know, " he said, in a state of extraordinary embarrassment. " He was called. Perhaps he doesn't feel inclined to come. I sent Vidoplassoff. I don't know. Perhaps I ought to go myself."

" I called in there on my way here, " remarked old Edgeviking mysteriously.

" Did you—did you really ? Well, and what ? " asked uncle nervously.

" He told me he could take his tea alone. He said a dry crust was good enough for him."

These words seemed to put my uncle into a condition of abject melancholy. " You should have talked to him, Evgraf ; you should have explained and soothed him, " he said reproachfully.

" I did, I did, sir ; but he didn't say a word to me for a long time ; he was doing some intricate mathematical problem, some dreadful-looking thing. He went three times over it, and only after the fourth he looked up and saw me. ' I won't come, ' he said, ' there's a *scholar* there. What's the good of my coming when you have such a shining light among you ? ' So he expressed it. ' Shining light, ' sir. " The old fellow glanced at me.

" There ! I thought so, " said my uncle, with a gesture of despair. " That's *you*, you know, Sergey. You are the scholar. What on earth are we to do now ? "

" Well, uncle, " I said, shrugging my shoulders, " I really don't think such a childish message is worthy of much attention ; in fact, I don't understand why you are making yourself so miserable."

" Oh ! my dear fellow, you don't know what you are saying, " he said, waving his arms about.

"Well, it's no use crying over spilt milk," said Miss Pereplitsin suddenly. "If Thomas Tomich is angry now, I'm ~~sue~~ it's nobody's fault but the colonel's. Oh, yes! I know what I'm talking about. When you've cut off the head, you needn't cry over the hair. If you had only listened to your mother, you would have been saved all this sorrow."

"But what on earth have I done? Where am I to blame in this?" asked my poor uncle, beside himself with despair.

"Done! Why, you are an egotist, sir, and you don't love your own mother!" replied the Pereplitsin with dignity. "Why couldn't you have respected your mother's wishes from the first? What I say is the *truth*, sir. I am a major's daughter. Kindly remember that!"

It appeared to me that this amiable woman had lugged herself into the conversation for the express purpose of informing the company in general, myself, as a new arrival, in particular, that she was a major's daughter, and not an "anybody."

"Because he loves to insult his own mother," broke in the stern voice of Mrs. General.

"Oh, mother! do have some mercy! When have I ever insulted you?"

"Because you are a wicked egotist, Egor," continued Mrs. General, becoming more and more animated.

"Mother, mother. Why am I a wicked egotist?" cried poor uncle, in utter despair. "Five days, five whole days, have you been angry with me, and won't talk to me; and why, and why? Let me be judged; let the whole world be my judge; let it hear my justification. I've been silent too long, mother, you would never hear me speak; let me be heard now, once for all. Listen, Obnoskin, Misinchikoff, all of you—listen. Sergey, you are, so to speak, an outsider, and you can judge me without prejudice. Listen—"

"Be calm, colonel, be calm," said Mrs. Obnoskin, "don't kill your poor mamma entirely."

"No, madame, I will not kill my mother!" cried my uncle in the wildest state of excitement, "and I don't wish to offend anybody; in fact, I will begin by allowing that Thomas Tomich is a most honourable, high minded man; but, for all that, he has not been just towards me in this matter. . . . I allow that it is all, *all* meant in kindness to myself, but he is not, he is, *indeed*, not just to me in this instance. I'll tell you all about it, and you shall hear the whole story, and judge whether

mother is right to be so angry with me for not listening to ~~Thomas~~. You listen to me, Sergey, and tell me whether you think I am right or wrong. You see, it was about a week ago, there came through the town near us my old chief, General Rusapetoff, with his wife and sister. They were to stop a few days. I was delighted to learn of it, of course, and off I rushed to see them, and ask them to dinner. Well, he promised to come if he could. A splendid fellow he is, and a great man, too. So, there was naturally a considerable stir in the household—cooks were busy, music was arranged for, and I was as happy as possible, looking forward to see my old friend and his ladies. Thomas Tomich was not pleased that I should be so happy over these people, and at lunch, I remember, he suddenly jumped up, and said: 'I'm insulted! I'm offended!' 'Why, how, Thomas?' I asked. 'Because you neglect me, now-a-days; you won't look at anyone but a general. You love the general better than myself.' Of course, all this is cut short, but you've no idea of the dreadful things he accused me of. What was to be done? All I could do was to walk about looking, for all the world, like a damp cock.

"At last, the great day caine, but the general sent to say that he couldn't come. Off I went to Thomas: 'Thomas,' I said, 'it's all right, he's not coming.' But Thomas won't forgive me, if you please. 'I am wounded,' he says. I try to soothe him. 'No, no,' he says, 'go to your generals, you love them better than me. You've torn asunder the sacred tie of friendship.' Oh, dear me! and I understand the man so thoroughly. I know it's all for my sake, and for my own good, that Thomas acts so, and out of love, too, for me,—a kind of jealousy. He feels jealous of my going among these people; he does not wish to lose his hold over my mind, and he wants to try how much I should be ready to sacrifice for ~~him~~.

"'No, no,' he says, 'if you make me a general, and call me "your excellency," then I'll perhaps forgive you, but not before that. I am just as good a general as any of them,' he says. 'And how am I to prove my respect for you, Thomas, if I allow that you are just as good as any of them, how am I to prove that I think so?' I ask him. 'Why, by calling me "your excellency," for a whole day. That will serve for a proof,' says he.

"Imagine my amazement! 'and it will be a very good lesson for you, too,' he says, 'and teach you not to be so gushing with

great people, when, perhaps, there are others nearer home who are as good and better than any of your fine generals.' Well, I really could not stand that. I admit, freely, that I *could* not stand it. 'Why, Thomas Tomich, my good fellow,' I said, 'how *can* I do that sort of thing, as if I have the right to make a general of you? Why, just reflect how generals attain their rank. I can't make you a general, and how am I to call you "your excellency," unless you *are* one? A general has served his country, and shed his blood on the battle-field; how can I treat you as a general?—the thing's absurd. You know quite well I would do anything reasonable for you, Thomas. Why, I even shaved my whiskers off because you thought whiskers unpatriotic. I didn't like it, but I did it, and I will always do anything I can for you; but don't insist upon being a general.' 'No, no,' he says, 'I won't be friends until you call me "your excellency." It will be good for your morals to put your pride in your pocket for once; your soul will be all the better for it.'

"And now it's a week and more," continued poor uncle, "that he neither speaks nor listens to me; and if anyone comes into the house, any visitors, he is angry with them, too. And as soon as he heard you were coming, Sergey, he said that if a foot of you entered the house, he should march out. Well, now, how am I to blame in all this? Judge me. What have I done? *Can* I consent to call him 'your excellency?' What have I done? *Am* I to blame?"

"Yes, because you are jealous of him, Egor," growled out Mrs. General.

"Mamma!" cried uncle, in despair, "you'll drive me mad. Who taught you to say these things to me? If you persist in treating me like this, I shall become a log or a stone, instead of a loving son to you."

"Ihcle," I said, "I heard from Mr. Bachchéef that Thomas Tomich is jealous of Iliusha's name-day to-morrow, and insists on being congratulated himself, as well as Iliusha, upon the anniversary. I confess this characteristic nonsense on his part amazed and amused me so much that I—"

"No, no, it's his birthday, my boy, not his name-day," explained my uncle. "His birthday! No, no! that's all right enough."

"It's, not his birthday a bit in the world!" cried Sásha. "Why, his birthday was last March, don't you remember? We went to a service at the monastery; we drove there, and he

sprawled in the carriage, and made it uncomfortable for everybody else. He kept calling out that the cushion was bruising his side, don't you remember? and when we went up to wish him 'many happy returns,' he got angry because there wasn't a camellia in the bouquet we took him. 'I love camellias,' he said, 'because my taste is refined; and you knew it, and grudged to pick one for me,' and not another word could we get out of him all day."

I think if a shell had fallen into the middle of the room its sudden arrival would have amazed and startled the company less than did this frank disclosure on Sásha's part—Sásha, who was not even allowed to speak above a whisper in her grandmother's presence!

Mrs. General, dumb with amazement and rage, rose majestically from her seat and glared at her impudent grandchild, unable to believe her ears! Uncle trembled with dread.

"There!" whined Miss Pereplitsin; "that's the way the children are brought up in this house! taught to kill their grandmother!"

"Sásha, Sásha!" cried uncle, beside himself. "Sásha, remember whose presence you are in, you forget yourself!"

"No, I will *not* be quiet, papa!" cried Sásha, jumping up from her chair and stamping her little foot, her eyes glaring like burning coals, "I *won't* be quiet! we have suffered long enough with your bad, your *wicked* Thomas Tomich. He is making life miserable to us all because you flatter him, and tell him nonsense about his generosity and nobility and goodness, and like a fool as he is, he believes every word of it! You give him enough sweet dishes to make anyone else sick, but Thomas Tomich swallows everything and asks for more. You'll see, he'll ruin us all before he's done, and papa is to blame for it all. Beast—beast, Thomas Tomich!—*wicked*, wretched man!—I say it out right—I'm not afraid of anybody. He's foolish and capricious and petty and mean and cruel, and a tyrant and a scandal-monger and a liar—oh! I would kick him out of the gate this minute if I had anything to do with it, and papa only flatters him. Papa has simply gone mad over him."

"Oh—h—h—h!" shrieked Mrs. General, and flopped on to the sofa, apparently in a fainting condition.

"Mrs. General—Mrs. General—my angel—take my bottle! Here, water—quick!" shouted Mrs. Obnoskin.

"Water, water!" yelled my uncle. "Mamma, do be calm, I beg you on my knees—be calm!"

"Yes, you ought to be put on bread and water and shut up in a dark room, little murderer!" hissed the Pereplitsin, trembling with rage, to Sásha.

"And so I will—with pleasure," cried Sásha. "I'm not afraid of that. I defend papa because he does not know how to defend himself. Who is this Thomas Tomich—who is he? *What* is he, compared to papa? He eats papa's bread and turns and insults him, the mean wretch that he is. I'd tear your Thomas Tomich to pieces, that's what I would do if I could. I'd like to call him out to a duel and shoot him dead with my pistol."

"Sásha, Sásha!" cried my uncle in utter despair. "One more word and I break down, completely."

"Papa, papa!" cried poor little Sásha, rushing to her father and bursting into tears as she hugged him round with both arms; "oh papa, why do *you*—my good, kind, merry, handsome, wise old father, why do *you* allow yourself to be bullied in this way? Is it for *you*, of all people, to be made second fiddle to that wicked, ungrateful man, and to be his toy and tool? Papa, papa! my darling old father, don't." She sobbed bitterly, then, covering her face with her hands, rushed out of the room.

Now began a scene of woeful confusion. Mrs. General lay swooning on the sofa; uncle knelt at her side and kissed her hands; Miss Pereplitsin hovered around, pulverising us all with her looks of rage and solemn contempt. Mrs. Obnoskin was busy wetting Mrs. General's temples and manipulating the scent-bottle; Aunt Proskóvia sat and cried; old Edgevikin sat huddled and forgotten in a corner; the governess stood still in her place, pale with terror. Only Misinchikoff remained unmoved; he walked up to the window and stood looking out without taking the slightest notice of anybody or anything.

Suddenly Mrs. General sat up in her place, and scanned me from head to foot with great severity.

"Go away!" she said, stamping her foot at me. "Get out!"

I must confess this amiable speech took me quite unawares.

"Away—out of the house! What did he come here for?

Get away, there's not to be a suspicion of him in the place. Away!"

"Mamma, mamma! what are you thinking of? Why, this is Sergey—come here on a visit," cried poor uncle, trembling all over with alarm and nervousness.

"Nonsense—Sergey? it's nobody of the sort. Get out—you! It's Korofskin, I know it is. He has come here to turn Thomas out—he was sent for on purpose—I know it—my heart tells me so. Get out of this, good-for-nothing! Will you?"

"Uncle!" I said, trembling with righteous indignation, "if that's the state of the case, I think perhaps, if you'll excuse me—" and I took up my hat.

"Sergey—Sergey!" cried my wretched uncle, following me and taking my hat out of my hands. "Mamma, this is Sergey—on my honour it is. No, no," he added to me in a lower tone, "you're my guest and you are to stay. Don't mind her—she's in a bad humour just now; all you have to do is to keep shady for a little, and all will be well. She'll forgive you—she will indeed. She takes you for Korofskin, it will all be right in a few minutes. . . . What do *you* want?" he added to Gavril who had just entered the room in a state of extreme nervous excitement.

Gavril had come in with another servant, a young and very handsome fellow of about sixteen, taken into the house-service on account of his good looks, as I heard afterwards. His name was Thalaley. He was dressed curiously in a red silk shirt with lace trimming, black silk knee breeches and goat-skin boots, turned down at the top with red leather. This boy was sobbing bitterly, and the tears welled one by one out of his great blue eyes.

"What's the matter now?" cried my uncle; "what is it? Speak, you booby."

"Thomas Tomich sent us here," said Gavril, looking wretched enough for anything. "He's coming here himself directly to examine me. Thalaley has been dancing—"

"Dancing!" cried my uncle.

"Yes, sir, da—dancing," stammered Thalaley, sobbing.

"What—'the Kamarinsky?'"

"Ye—yes, and Thomas Tomich caught me at it!"

"Thomas Tomich!" announced Vidoplassoff at this moment entering the room.

The door opened wide, and the great Thomas Tomich, *in propria persona*, broke upon the enraptured gaze of the company.

CHAPTER VI.

BUT before I do myself the honour of introducing this eminent personage to my readers, I feel bound to say a few words about the humbler Thalaley, and to explain why the fact that the boy danced the "Kamarinsky Moujik"—a most popular Russian village dance and song—should have produced such a painful impression upon my uncle and the others.

My uncle was very fond of Thalaley, who was an orphan child of two late serfs at Stepánczikoff; my deceased aunt had been his godmother. The fact that my uncle loved the boy was quite sufficient to account for Thomas's hatred of him; but it so happened that Mrs. General liked Thalaley also, and therefore in spite of Thomas's dislike he remained upstairs as a house servant. Thomas kept touch of this grievance, and visited it on my uncle at every possible opportunity.

He was certainly a very pretty boy, with a sweet girl's face; and it was a question whether Mrs. General preferred Thalaley or her little cur "Amy." One could not call the boy an idiot, absolutely; but he was so ridiculously simple, and naive, and ingenuous, that his conduct almost amounted to idiocy occasionally. He would take part in the conversation going on among the gentry; he would invariably come and relate any dream he might happen to have had; very often these were of a nature to send the old lady into a swoon—in fact, not at all suitable for ladies' ears. He was sensitive to a degree, gentle and long-suffering as a sheep, and merry and happy as any little child.

Thomas Tomich cherished his revengeful feelings against poor Thalaley for a long while; but eventually, finding that in this one instance he was beaten by circumstances, he determined to become Thalaley's benefactor and friend; he would teach him morality, manners, and French, to begin with. "Why," thought Thomas—and a thoroughly characteristic idea it was—"he is always with his mistress upstairs, and supposing she were suddenly to forget his ignorance and say, 'donnez moi, mon

mouchoir!—therefore he must be ready for such emergencies." But it turned out that Thalaley was quite unteachable; his uncle the cook had long ago endeavoured to drum a little Russian grammar into his head, and had given it up as a bad job. Thomas was unable to teach Thalaley anything, even manners. He would persist in telling all his dreams in spite of Thomas's sermons, and Thalaley remained Thalaley through everything. Of course Thomas's ill success was visited on my uncle!

"Do you know what he did to-day?" Thomas would ask, taking the opportunity of speaking when the whole party were assembled. "Think what your systematic spoiling of this boy has led to at last, colonel—" and then would follow the story of Thalaley's latest achievement.

I may mention that Thalaley was a beautiful dancer. Dancing seemed to be a special gift with him; he danced gracefully and most energetically, and with great animation and style, but his favourite dance was the "Kamarinsky Moujik." Not that he especially admired the cunning and the various—quite unspeakable—achievements of that historical personage, whose conduct, according to the vulgar Russian song, was below all criticism; but the thing was that he could not listen to the inspiring strains of that particular melody *without* dancing. Very often of an evening two or three footmen, the coachman, the gardener (who played the fiddle a little), and a few of their ladies, would assemble on a favourable spot somewhere behind the out-houses, as far away from Thomas Tomich as possible; music would commence, then songs, perhaps, and a dance; and in its turn the Kamarinsky would be certain to come on for performance. Thalaley was worth seeing on such occasions. He would dance himself out of himself, as it were; he danced the strength out of his body and still went on, stimulated by the cries and laughter of the spectators. He shouted, and yelled, and laughed, and clapped his hands; he danced as though he were in possession of some motive force which is inaccessible to meaner mortals, forcing the time and beating his heels on the ground to mark it. These were moments of real happiness to Thalaley,—and all would have been well, had not, unfortunately, a knowledge of these goings on reached the ears of Thomas Tomich.

Thomas Tomich was overwhelmed with horror, and sent for uncle.

"I merely wished to ask you one thing, colonel," said Thomas to the former. "Have you absolutely made up your mind—vowed, in fact—to ruin this poor boy, or is there still hope for him? In the first case, if you are quite determined, I shall leave the house at once; if there is still hope for him, I shall perhaps consent—"

"Why, what's the matter? What on earth has happened?" asked my uncle, frightened out of his wits.

"How, what has happened? Am I to understand that you are unaware that he dances the Kamarinsky?"

"Well, well—what of that?"

"How—what of that!" shrieked Thomas. "You, *you* can say 'what of that!'—you, his master, and in a sense his father? May I ask whether you are aware what the Kamarinsky is? Are you aware that this song relates the most immoral and dreadful conduct of a low moujik who rushes drunk out of a common public-house and perpetrates enormities which are perfectly unspeakable? Let me remind you that you wound my moral sense by your reply to my question. Do you understand, sir, that you insult me—~~me~~, personally, to the core? Do you understand this, sir, or do you not?"

"Oh, but—Thomas—it's only a song after all."

"How—only a song? and you are not ashamed to own before me that you *know* this song. You, a member of a good family, the father of innocent children, and a colonel in the army besides. Only a song, indeed! How can any honest man stand up and say that he knows that song, without his cheeks burning with the flush of shame; how can any respectable person admit that he has even so much as *heard* the song? tell me that."

"Why, you must know it yourself, Thomas, if you are so shocked by it," said my uncle in the simplicity of his soul, and bewildered by Thomas's wrathful strictures.

"What—what?" cried Thomas. "I—I know the song? An insult!" and he jumped from his chair, trembling with rage. He had not expected such a home-thrust as this.

I cannot attempt to paint the rage of Thomas Tomich. Uncle was never forgiven for the unintended sarcasm of his reply, and Thomas registered a mental vow to catch Thalaley red-handed, in the very act of dancing the Kamarinsky. Of an evening, after dinner, when he was supposed to be busy in his room, Thomas took to walking abroad, and from a distance

would spy the place where the dances and songs went on ; and flattered himself with the idea of the row which he would kick up in the household if ever he were lucky enough to catch the Kamariasky going on.

At last his hopes and endeavours were rewarded with success—he caught Thalaley in the act. I need not explain, any further, the dreadful state of mind of my poor uncle when he learned that Thomas had detected Thalaley dancing, and was coming down in a minute or two to hold a family gathering over the culprit, or his alarm when Vidoplassoff opened the door and announced the approach of the great man in his own person.

CHAPTER VII.

I GAZED at this personage with the greatest curiosity. Gavril was quite right when he described him as a miserable looking little wretch. He was short, with white eyebrows and lashes, and a hooked nose ; his hair was rather grey, and his face was covered with small wrinkles, and he wore a long beard. His age must have been something under fifty. He came into the room with measured steps and his eyes fixed on the carpet ; but the most impudent self-conceit was on every lineament of his face and in his figure.

To my astonishment he came in a dressing-gown—a foreign-made thing certainly, but still a dressing-gown ; and what is more, he had slippers on. The collar of his shirt, which was innocent of necktie, was thrown back *à l'enfant*, and this gave Thomas Tomich a most silly appearance.

He drew an arm-chair to the table and sat down without addressing a word to any one present. Everything was so still in the room, at this moment, that you might have heard a fly flit across it. The confusion of a moment before had subsided entirely. Mrs. General looked as peaceful and quiet as a lamb. All the old idiot's enthusiastic adoration for Thomas was now clearly visible on her face. She could not look at him enough ; she drank deep draughts of him with her eyes. Miss Lereplitsin showed her teeth and sat rubbing her hands together ; Aunt

Proskovia made no attempt to conceal her alarm, but sat and shivered with fright. My uncle instantly commenced to fuss over Thomas.

"Tea, tea—quick, sister! lots of sugar. Thomas Tomich likes a nice sweet cup of tea after his nap—don't you, Thomas?"

"I've no time to think of you and your tea just at present," replied Thomas, with dignity—making a gesture expressive of a busy intellect being bothered with trivial interruptions. These words, and Thomas's ridiculous presence as he entered the room with his pedantic pomp and circumstance, struck me as something *too* good. I was anxious to see now to what length the absurdities of this impudent little humbug would go.

"Thomas!" cried my uncle, "let me introduce my nephew, Sergey Alexandrovitch. Just arrived!"

Thomas Tomich glared at my uncle from head to foot.

"I am surprised at the systematic persistence with which you always insist upon interrupting me, colonel," he observed, after a considerable pause of eloquent silence, but without paying the very slightest attention to my humble self. "You may remark, if you choose, that I am occupied with business; and yet you think fit to chatter about goodness knows what! Have you seen Thalaley?"

"Yes, Thomas, I have—"

"Oh, very well! then you shall look at him once more—there!—gaze your fill at your production, in a *moral* sense of the word. Come here, idiot! come on, come on! don't be afraid!"

Thalaley approached, sobbing and swallowing his tears. Thomas Tomich glared at him, delighting in his abject wretchedness.

"I think Paul Seimeonovitch," he began, addressing Obnoskin, "I think in a case like this the plain truth should be told, because however one covers up dirt, it still remains dirt! Then why gloss it over? it is mere deceit; the need of such deception can only exist under false conditions of social morality. Now, I put it to you, do you see any beauty in that face? Of course, I mean high moral, enlightened, spiritual beauty—not a mere pretty face."

Thomas Tomich spoke calmly, but with a sort of suppressed exaltation.

"Beauty in him?" replied Obnoskin, with an assumption of impudent negligence. "No; I see in him nothing more than a bit of good enough roast beef."

"This morning," continued Thomas, "I went to my glass and carefully examined the presentment of my own features. I am far from considering myself a handsome man, but I was nevertheless forced to the conclusion that there is a something in this grey eye of mine which puts me in a different category from these Thalaleys. It is Thought, Life, Intellect in that eye! Mind, I am not making a personal boast; I am merely illustrating our caste in my own person. Now, do you suppose that there can be a single idea latent within the soul of this live beefsteak? And have you never noticed, by the way, with reference to these common people, who feed principally on flesh, how vulgarly and disgustingly fresh-looking their faces are! Here, you; come here, come nearer and let us admire you. Now then—don't gaze like that—tell me, do you think yourself good-looking?"

"Ye—yes!" sobbed Thalaley.

Obnoskin roared with laughter. "As for me, I felt myself beginning to tremble with rage.

"There—you hear him!" cried Thomas, triumphantly; "and you shall have more directly, for I have summoned him for an examination. You must know, Mr. Obnoskin, that there are certain people who are anxious to bring this young idiot to absolute moral ruin. I may be judging them too strictly, but if so, it is pure love of humanity which prompts me to the error. This young man has just been dancing the most improper of all dances. Of course, none of those present have any cognizance of the dance in question, but we shall hear about it from himself. Now then, what have you been doing just now? Answer, and quickly too, you'd better."

"Da—dancing!" snuffled Thalaley, redoubling his sobs.

"And what have you been dancing? What dance? Answer; go on."

"The Kamarinsky!"

"The Kamarinsky—indeed! And who is this Kamarinsky? What is the Kamarinsky? How am I to understand such an answer as that? Now then, tell us more clearly, who was this Kamarinsky?"

"A moujik!"

"A moujik? no more than that? Dear me, he must have

been a very remarkable fellow, for people to compose songs and dances in his honour. Well, go on."

It was Thomas's speciality to stretch the sinews of his victims ; he loved to play with them as a cat with a mouse. However, Thalaley remained silent, he only sniffed ; he didn't understand.

"Go on," repeated Thomas ; "tell me, who was this moujik ? Was he a serf, or a government subject, or free, or bought out, or what ? There are plenty of kinds moujiks."

"He was fr—free by purchase."

"Oh, indeed—you hear, Mr. Obnoskin—the Kamarinsky moujik—who is handed down to posterity in poems and dances had purchased his freedom ; this is most interesting—well ? What did the moujik do to deserve this honour at the poet's hands ?"

This question was decidedly ticklish ; indeed, considering that Thalaley was the person addressed, it was distinctly dangerous.

"Really—I think—," Obnoskin began, glancing at his mother, who was commencing to twist about on her sofa in rather a nervous way. But there was nothing to be done ; Thomas Tomich's caprices were regulated by unchangeable laws.

"I say, uncle," I whispered, "if you don't look out this boy will say something awful—just listen to the tendency of these questions—you must do something to stop it ;" but my uncle was too bewildered and dismayed to know what ought to be done.

"But, Thomas," he began, "you really— Let me introduce my nephew, Thomas—a young student—he is studying mineralogy just now—"

"May I beg you, colonel, not to interrupt me with your mineralogy—of which subject, so far as I am aware, you are quite ignorant,—as also, perhaps, *other people are*. I am not a child. This fellow here informs me that the Kamarinsky moujik, instead of working honestly to support his family, got drunk at a public-house, pawned his coat and drank that too, and so ran out drunk into the street. So far that is the burden of the song, the praise of drink. Now then, you, tell me again out loud what did this moujik do ? how did he distinguish himself so that posterity delights to honour him ? Well ?"

The unfortunate Thalaley, who could not make head or tail of Thomas's speeches, was now in the extremity of bewilder-

ment and woe; he stood opening and shutting his mouth like some wretched flounder just caught and flopping about on the sand.

"I'm ashamed to say," he blurted at last, in desperation.

"Ah! you're ashamed to say, are you. There, colonel, that's the answer I expected; he's ashamed to tell us about it, but he is not ashamed to *do* it; this is the morality which you have sown, which has now grown up and flowered, and which you are watering and cherishing. However, I am wasting words; go to the kitchen, Thalaley; I shall say no more to you now in deference to the company, but you shall be punished—this very day, mind—severely! Should I be prevented *again* from punishing you as you deserve, then you may remain here and indulge your master with the Kamarinsky to his heart's content; but I shall leave. Enough; I have spoken; go!"

"Aren't you just a little severe?" began Obnoskin.

"Yes, Thomas; yes," said my uncle, but broke off and was silent again. Thomas glared angrily at him.

"I am surprised," the latter continued, addressing Obnoskin, "after witnessing the scene we have just had enacted before us, that the literary people of the day do not inquire into the question as to what kind of poetry the Russian peasant sings and dances to. What have all our Pouschkins, and Lermontoffs, and so on, been thinking of? It amazes me. Here are the common people singing and dancing the Kamarinsky—an apotheosis of drunkenness—and our poets write odes to forget-me-nots and such things. Why cannot they write something nobler than Kamarinsky for the peasants, and stop twaddling about forget-me-nots? Why cannot they represent some noble Russian peasant—it is a grand thought, but well within the bounds of possibility—contented and happy with his family around him, poor perhaps, but looking without envy at his wealthy neighbour; virtuous, and a doer of good deeds; respected by rich and poor, and so on? Why can't we have such a picture as this—instead of, on the one hand, forget-me-nots, and on the other this miserable Kamarinsky monst'r rushing, drunk and noisy, down the village street?"

"poetry in a picture such as this? What are we to do with it? Where is the grace of it, the wit, the morality?"

"Thomas Tomich, put me down a hundred roubles in your debt for that noble sentiment," cried old Eggevakin, with a

look of ecstasy, "the devil a copeak will he ever get out of me, though," he whispered to me.

"Yes, it was a fine idea, that," remarked Obnoskin.

"Yes, yes; it was, it was noble," said my uncle in a transport of admiration, "but what a theme, eh? Thomas, here is my nephew;" he added, "he, too, has done something in the way of literature."

Thomas, as before, took not the slightest notice of my uncle's remark.

"For goodness' sake, don't introduce me any more, I beg it of you," I whispered in uncle's ear.

"Ivan Ivanovitch," said Thomas, addressing Misinchikoff very abruptly, "what do you think of the question at issue?"

"I? do you mean me?" asked Misinchikoff, with the air of a man just awaked from sleep.

"Yes, sir—you, I ask you because I value the opinion of really intellectual men, and think very little of those problematically intellectual people whose intellect consists solely in the fact that they are *perpetually introduced* as clever men, and scholars: and who are sometimes even sent for specially to be shewn off."

Here was a stone thrown into my orchard, with a vengeance. I have not the slightest doubt that Thomas got up this talk about literature solely and exclusively for my benefit, in order that he might annihilate and pulverize, once and for ever, this new St. Petersburg scholar-fellow at the very first step.

"If you want my opinion—I quite agree with yours," said Misinchikoff, diplomatically.

"So that you all agree with me!" said Thomas. "Now, I think," he continued, after a slight pause, "that if I could bring myself to write for the papers, I should write like that delightful Perepischuk—there's a flow of wit! how he plays with his words!"

"Oh, you'd write very much better than that!" observed Edgevikin.

"There's such a melodious flow about his writing!" hazarded my uncle.

Thomas Tomich's patience was exhausted.

"Colonel!" he began, "may I beg you once more to be so kind as to avoid breaking into our conversation? I wish to say so with all courtesy, but at the same time I must remind you that you are incapable of understanding our talk on these

subjects! Do not, therefore, break up our pleasant little scientific party. Busy yourself with your agricultural interests, drink tea—do anything, but don't meddle with literature. I daresay the cause of literature will not suffer much!"

This sort of thing was really becoming just a little agitating. I didn't know what to think.

"Why, you said yourself, Thomas, that it had a melodious ring in it," cried my bewildered relative.

"Yes, true; but I spoke with knowledge of my subject, while you—"

"Oh dear, oh dear! I'm wrong again!" cried my uncle, good humouredly, and with his delightfully frank smile.

"At all events, it's a good thing that you acknowledge your fault," remarked Thomas.

"Never mind, never mind! I am not angry, Thomas. Why, I have often asked you to pull me up when I am talking nonsense; and you do it, which is smart and business-like of you. Thanks! Thomas, I will take advantage of your kind hints."

My patience was on the ebb. I had thought, before I saw him, that the stories about Thomas Tomich must be more or less exaggerated; however, now that I saw and observed the man with my own eyes, my amazement knew no bounds. I could not understand such bewildering effrontery and impudence, such boundless conceit, on the one side; and such voluntary slavery, such credulous simplicity and goodness of heart on the other. However, even uncle seemed more or less confused at Thomas's overwhelming audacity. I longed to be "at him"—to overwhelm him—to be rude to him somehow or other. The thought enlivened me, and I awaited my opportunity, picking the rim of my hat to pieces in my impatience. But Thomas would not notice me, I could not get a chance.

"You are right, Thomas; it's quite true," continued my uncle, doing his utmost to turn the conversation into a more amiable groove. "You are quite right, and I thank you for the kind hint. Certainly, one should never take part in the consideration of any matter unless one knows something about it. I admit the fact; indeed, I have experienced the truth of your words more than once;—imagine, Sergey, I once acted as *examiner*! You laugh—I did though—on my honour. You see I happened to be invited to witness an examination at some establishment or other, and as there happened to be a seat empty on the examiner's bench, I was put there. Well, I con-

fess I was as frightened as I could be, for I knew nothing of a single science. However, it all went off, grandly. I even asked some questions—I asked them, 'Who was Noah?' I must say they all answered capitally, and then we all went in and had a rare good lunch, and drank their health in champagne."

Thomas and Obnoskin roared with laughter.

"I assure you, I laughed myself at the time," said my uncle, delighted to see that the audience were amused, and laughing in his own hearty way himself; "but wait a bit, Thomas, just let me tell you how I put my foot in it one day. Just fancy, Sergey, we were quartered at Krasnogorsk—"

"May I be allowed to ask, colonel," Thomas interrupted, "whether you are going to take very long over your story?"

"Oh, Thomas, just let me tell you this. You'll roar with laughter. I must first tell you how I let myself in—"

"Oh, delighted to hear it, I'm sure," said Obnoskin, yawning.

Thomas saw, to his regret, that he must listen.

"Well," began my uncle, excitedly, and beaming with delight: "we were stationed at Krasnogorsk, and the very night of our arrival, we all went to the theatre. There was a lovely girl acting (she ran away with a local celebrity before the play had run its course). Well, during the interval between the acts I got up to look about me, and whom should I recognise but an old friend of mine—one Kornouchoff. We had not met for six years; well, we were delighted to see one another and all that, and we got talking. There happened to be three ladies in a box near us, one of them—at the left side—a very curious looking old creature. I found out afterwards that she was a most worthy person, mother of a large family, and everything respectable. Well, like an ass, I must needs ask Kornouchoff 'who that old mummy in the box was.' 'Which?' 'Why, that one?' 'Oh, that's my cousin!' Imagine my feelings! Well, to get out of the mess, I said, 'No, no! not that one—what eyes you've got! It's that one there—further that way!' 'Oh, that's my sister!' Oh, curse the thing! I thought, and the fellow's sister was a lovely girl, too, a regular little rosebud! She ran away and got married without leave soon afterwards—little rascal! Well, 'no, no!' I said, 'not that one—that other one over *there*, the one in the middle!' 'Oh, the one in the middle?—that's my wife, my dear fellow!' 'Well,' I said, 'my dear boy, did you ever see a fool like *here's* one before you; and *here's* his head, punch it if you like, peg away!' How he laughed. After the

piece was over he introduced me, and I believe the beggar had told them the whole story, for they were laughing like anything about something or other. So there, you see, Thomas, how one can put one's foot in it sometimes. Ha, ha, ha!"

But poor uncle laughed in vain. He turned his kind merry old face towards the audience sanguinely, but it was no use, a dead silence was the only reply to his story. Thomas Tomich sat gloomy and speechless, and the rest took their cue from him; only Obnoskin smiled slightly, not at the story, but in anticipation of fun to follow at uncle's expense.

Poor uncle blushed and looked confused; this was just what Thomas wanted.

"Have you quite finished, sir?" he asked at last.

"Yes, Thomas—"

"And are you pleased?"

"How do you mean, 'pleased,' Thomas?" asked my unfortunate relative, beginning to look very miserable.

"Do you feel easier and happier for having broken up a pleasant literary conversation, which you interrupted in order to satisfy your petty feeling of self-love?"

"Oh, nonsense, Thomas. I only wanted to amuse you all, and—"

"Amuse?" cried Thomas, bursting into a sudden paroxysm of indignation. "Amuse, indeed! Your stories are more calculated to depress than to amuse. Amuse us, indeed! Are you aware, sir, that your story was verging on the immoral? I do not say *improper*, because that goes without saying. The point of your anecdote was that you thought fit to make fun of a noble and high-born lady because, if you please, her personal appearance was not such as to rouse your admiration. And you expected to make us, us join in your mirth, that is, support and encourage you in a rude and improper action—simply because you are the master of this house. It's your own affair, colonel, and you are at liberty to engage or invite any number of sympathising friends and connexes and boon companions. You may even send for them from distant parts, in order to swell the number of the partners in your improper amusements, to the destruction of all pure-mindedness and propriety in the house; but Thomas Obnoskin will never consent to be your fool and flatterer and companion in vice. No, sir, I am your humble servant in any other respects, but I draw the line where I must transgress the dictates of my conscience."

" My good Thomas, you misunderstood me altogether—"

" No, colonel, excuse me, I did not. I understand your character thoroughly ; you are dominated by the most boundless self-love ; you aspire to a sphere of intellectuality which you cannot reach, and you forget that a claim to wisdom which one does not possess blunts what little one has."

" Thomas, don't remember at least that the servants are still in the room," entreated poor uncle.

" I cannot help it, colonel. I cannot see these things and keep silence. Were I to hold my tongue, I might be accused of flattering you by my silence. Some *youngster*, (this was for my benefit) "might take me for your parasite. Perhaps I redoubled my usual candour this day, perhaps I have trembled on the verge of rudeness ; but if so, you have forced me to it, sir. You are too arrogant with me, colonel, I dread being thought your slave. You take a delight in humiliating me before *strangers*—me, who am your equal—yes, sir, your *equal* in all respects. Perhaps I may go so far as to say that I am doing you a favour in living here—not you, *ma*. If others humiliate me, I am bound to assert myself—it is natural. I cannot help speaking. I *must* speak, and, therefore, I tell you, colonel, that you are phenomenally jealous of others ; you hear a man express his—well, say his literary opinions, showing his taste and erudition in so doing ; you cannot stand that, 'wait a bit,' you say, 'let me show them my taste and erudition too,' and what sort of taste do you possess, I should like to know ? You will excuse me, perhaps, for saying so, but you have about as much idea of elegance and taste as a bull has of roast beef. That is perhaps a little rude and *brusque* on my part, but at all events it is honest and candid. You don't hear that sort of thing from your flatterers, colonel ! "

" Oh, Thomas ! "

" Yes, 'Oh, Thomas !' truth is not a feather bed, you see. But, enough ; we can talk of this another time. Now, then, I hope to be able to amuse the company a little. Mr. Obnoskin, you see that marvel in human guise, standing there ? look at him well—he wants to eat me alive, he does ! "

Thomas was referring to Gavril, who was still standing at the door, evidently suffering anguish at seeing his master so bullied.

" Now, then, come nearer—you. There, sir, that is Gavril ; for rudeness and misconduct he is condemned to learn French.

Now, then, *monsieur* ; I am a sort of Orpheus—teaching moral truths—not by song, but by the French language. Now, then, *monsieur*, do you know your lesson?"

"I have been getting it up," said old Gavril, hanging his head.

"And *parlez-vous Français*?"

"*Oui, monsieur, je le parle un peu*"

I don't know whether it was the ridiculous figure of Gavril or whether the company thought Thomas wished them to laugh; but, anyhow, at the very first sound of Gavril's voice, they all burst into a roar of laughter. Even Mrs. General condescended to smile; Mrs. Obnoskin lay back and shook with laughter, covering her face with her fan. The mirth reached its fullest pitch when Gavril, irritated at the reception, suddenly made a gesture of spitting on the ground, and exclaimed :

"To think I should have lived to see such a day of shame in my old age!" Thomas started.

"What, what!" he cried, "are you going to be impudent?"

"No, Thomas Tomich," Gavril replied, with dignity, "it is not my way to be impudent to gentry; but every man is made in the image of God, and I am sixty-three years old, and my father served in this family and died honourably; and never have I seen, up to this day—serf though I be—never have I seen the laugh of scorn raised upon me like this." And poor Gavril bent his head down into his hands. My uncle came up to him at once :

"Never mind, Gavril!—it's nothing—never mind," he said.

"All right, all right," cried Thomas, looking a little pale, "let him speak. These are some of the results of your system!"

"Yes, I will speak," continued Gavril. "I am not ashamed of being a serf. I am ready to do my duty. I have never swerved in my loyalty to my master, Thomas Tomich; and I do my duty with pleasure, because it is my duty. But I will not be made to bark like a terrier in a heathenish foreign lingo, and be laughed at and put to shame for my trouble. I can't go into the servants' hall but I am laughed at and called 'Frenchy.' No! Mr. Thomas Tomich, I am not the only fool. There are wiser people who agree with me, and they all say now, with one voice, that you are a wicked man, sir, and that our master is as a little child before you; and that though you may be of noble birth, for all we know, and not far from a

general in rank, yet, for all that, you are the basest of the base, and a very fury in your temper, into the bargain!"

Gavril finished. I was beside myself with delight.

Thomas Tomich sat pale and trembling with rage, the centre of all observation. He seemed to be stunned by Gavril's sudden attack, as though he could not, as yet, collect his scattered wits, and take stock of the position. At last came the outburst:

"How! he dares to abuse me, *me!* This is a rebellion!" And he jumped up off his chair. Mrs. General jumped up too, and wrung her hands. The confusion became general. Uncle rushed to Gavril and tried to get him out of the room.

"Put him in irons! put him in irons, at once!" shrieked Mrs. General. "Send him to town at once, Egor, and make a soldier of him, else you sha'n't have my blessing. Do you hear? off with him, and hand him over to the conscription--quick!"

"How!" yelled Thomas, "slave! villain! abusing me! he--the dirt off my feet—he dared to call me a fury!"

I stepped to the front at this moment with unusual decision.

"I confess, that in this matter I am entirely of Gavril's opinion," I said, looking Thomas full in the face, and trembling with passion.

He was so amazed at this sudden explosion on my part that for the first few moments I don't think he knew what had happened.

"What's this?" he cried at last, turning to me in fury, and focussing me with his little, blood-shot eyes. "Who are you?"

"Thomas Tomich," said my uncle, who was utterly lost and overwhelmed by the turn things had taken, "this is Sergey, my nephew."

"The scholar," screamed Thomas, "this is the scholar is it? Oho! *Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité!* *Journal des Débats!* Bosh! Humbug! Scholar, indeed. Why, I've forgotten seven times as much as he has learned—that's the sort of scholar he is."

I think he would have flown at me at this moment if he had not been held.

"Oh, the man's simply drunk," I said coolly, looking around for enlightenment.

"Who—*I*?" yelled Thomas, in a voice which did not sound like his own.

"Yes, you."

"Drunk?"

"Drunk."

This was more than Thomas could bear. He assumed an expression as of one undergoing vivisection, and rushed out of the room. Mrs General was just about to indulge in another swoon, but changed her mind and decided to run after Thomas Tomich instead. All the rest followed her, and uncle ran out too.

I rushed out on to the terrace, and thence into the garden. My head was whirling round and round.

VIII

FOR a quarter of an hour, I wandered moodily about; I was displeased with myself, I felt bothered, and did not know what to do next. The sun was setting. Suddenly, at the corner of a dusky avenue, I came face to face with Nastia. Her eyes were full of tears, and she held her handkerchief in her hand. She had been crying a good deal. *

"I was looking for you," she said.

"And I for you," I replied, "Tell me, am I in a madhouse or not?"

"No, certainly not—not at all," she said, gazing intently at me.

"Then, for goodness' sake, what does it all mean? Do give me some advice. What has become of my uncle? Can I go in and find him?" I am specially glad to meet you—you may help me, perhaps."

"You had better not go in. I have just left them myself."

"Where are they all?"

"Goodness knows! Very likely they have all run off into the kitchen-garden again," she replied, with a gesture of annoyance.

"How? What kitchen-garden—and why there?"

"Oh! that Thomas Tomich. Last week he called out that he wouldn't stay in the house another minute, tumbled out, and got a hoe from the tool-house and began working in the kitchen-garden. We all thought he had gone mad. 'There,' he said,

'I'm going to make it impossible for these people to reproach me afterwards with having eaten their bread ; I shall work here until I've worked off the value of the food I have consumed in this house, and then go—that's what they have brought me to.' And they all stood or knelt, crying, around him. He dug up all the turnips ; and at last they got his hoe away from him. Very likely he is trying it on again.'

"And you can tell me this so calmly!" I exclaimed with considerable irritation. She looked at me with sparkling eyes.

"Forgive me," I continued, "I don't know what I am talking about. But listen, are you aware why I have come down here?"

"N—no," she said, blushing violently ; and an expression of pain flitted over her sweet face.

"You will forgive me," I went on, "because I am in a state of nervous excitement, and I feel that perhaps I ought not to speak to you like this—especially to you ; but I really think that candour in these matters is far the best plan. What I wished to say is this : You—you know—I suppose—that it is my uncle's desire that I should aspire to your hand."

"Oh ! what nonsense ; don't mention such a thing, I entreat you!" she said, interrupting me hastily and blushing red.

I was a good deal puzzled.

"Nonsense ! Why, he wrote to me specially about it!"

"He wrote to you to that effect, did he?" she asked, with animation. "How could he—and he promised me not to ! Oh—what nonsense it is—what nonsense !"

"Forgive me," I said—I didn't know the least how to go on ; "but perhaps I have been too hasty, too precipitate ? You see, this is such a curious house—such odd people about us, that I—"

"Oh, don't apologise ; don't say anything more about it ! I assure you my position is difficult enough without that. I wanted to speak to you, too. Oh, what nonsense it all is ! And he wrote like that, did he ? And you must needs believe it, and come down post haste."

She did not conceal her annoyance. My position was hardly enviable.

"I confess," I blundered, in a state of dreadful confusion. "I confess I did not expect this. I expected quite a different turn of affairs. 'I thought—'

"Look here," she interrupted, biting her lip. "You will show me that letter of his, won't you?"

"Oh, very well!"

"Don't be angry, please; don't blame me. Life's bitter enough for me without making more quarrels," she said; but I saw a little mocking smile on her pretty lips for all that.

"Don't take me for a fool, please!" I exclaimed, wrathfully. "Perhaps you are prejudiced against me; perhaps some one has been telling you things about me; or maybe it is because I made a fool of myself in there? I assure you, you must not judge me by that. I know what a fool I must look in your eyes at this moment. Don't laugh at me, please. I don't know what I am saying—it's all because of my ~~dear~~ twenty-two years—excuse me."

"Why, what has that to do with it?"

"Oh, when a man's twenty-two years' old he's as good as branded with a big ~~22~~ on his forehead,—just like myself when I came into the middle of the room head first this afternoon,—or now, for instance—it's a detestable age to be."

"Not at all—not at all!" replied Nastia, doing her best not to laugh. "I am convinced that you are good and kind and clever—I really am, honestly; but you are conceited, and that is a fault which is easily remedied."

"I think I have just so much self-respect as is necessary."

"No; I think not. Why, this afternoon, look how confused you were, and all because you happened to slip as you came in. And what right had you to make a laughing stock of your good, kind uncle, who has done so much for you? Why did you try to turn the laugh on him because you ~~yourself~~ were ridiculous? Oh, for shame! for shame! it did you no honour, and I confess you were not admirable in my eyes at that moment."

"You are quite right there; I was a fool,—worse, I was a blackguard. You noticed it, and, therefore, I am punished enough; but perhaps you may change your opinion of me yet," I said, beginning to feel strangely affectionate. "You know me so little yet, that perhaps when you are more acquainted with me, you may perhaps—"

"Oh, do let's change the subject!" cried Nastia, with manifest impatience."

"Very well, very well," I said; "but where can I see you?"

"How, where can you see me?"

* "Why, surely I have not said my last word to you?" For

goodness' sake, Miss Nastia, make some appointment with me for another interview, to-day, if possible. Well, it's rather late to-day; say to-morrow morning early, and I'll tell them to wake me. You know that summer-house by the pond? I remember it—I know the road—I used to live here as a boy, you know."

"An appointment? but why? Surely we can talk just as we are talking now."

"Yes; but I don't know anything yet, Nastia. I must see my uncle and find out what he wants. He is bound to tell me, and then, perhaps, I may have something *most* important to say to you."

"No, no; it's useless," cried Nastia. "Say what you have to say now, so that we need not refer to it again; don't trouble to go to the summer-house, for I assure you, you won't find me there, and put all this nonsense out of your head, now—I beg you, seriously."

"Then my uncle has simply been playing the madman with me," I cried, in a burst of uncontrollable annoyance. "Why on earth did he send for me at all? But listen, what's that noise?" We were not far from the house, and through the open window I heard shrieks and cries.

"Good heavens!" cried Nastia. "Again! I was afraid they would."

"You were afraid? Tell me now. Nastia—just this one question. I know I have no right to catechize you, but I am determined to ask you just this one thing, for the good of all parties: is uncle in love with you, or not?"

"Oh, *do* get rid of all this nonsense, once and for ever," she cried, flushing with anger. "And *you* of all people. Why, how *can* he be in love with me when he wants *you* to marry me?" She smiled a bitter smile. "Where did you ever get the idea from? Can't you understand how the matter rests? Do you hear that yelling?"

"Yes; that's Thomas's voice, he—"

"Of course it's Thomas; and the quarrel going on at this moment is 'about me,' because they have got the same ridiculous notion as you have, that the colonel is in love with me. And as I am poor and insignificant, and an insult to myself is nothing to them, they want to drive me out of the house as a precautionary measure, and to marry the colonel to some one else. As soon as they mention it to him, though, he gets so angry that

he is ready to tear Thomas himself to pieces. There, listen ; they are screaming at each other about this *very* thing now, I'm sure they are."

"So that it's all true ; and he is really to be married to this Tatiana ?"

"What Tatiana ?"

"Why, that old lunatic."

"She is *by no means* a lunatic : she is a very good, kind old body. You have no right to speak of her like that ; she has a most noble heart—far nobler than most. She is not to blame because she is unfortunate."

"Forgive me ; I allow that *you* are right. But is it not just possible that you are making a *mistake*?—why is it that they are so polite to your father, if, as you say, they are so angry with yourself? If this were the case surely they would not be so polite to him."

"Why, don't you see what my father is undergoing for my sake? Don't you see how he plays the clown for them, and how he has insinuated himself into Thomas's good graces, because Thomas was himself a clown and feels it a consolation now to have one of his own? You don't suppose my father would do this except for my sake? You may think him funny and clownish, but I can tell you he is a noble—a most noble and generous old man. He thinks it is best for me to stay here, not because I get good wages—I assure you that fact has no weight with him. But I think quite otherwise, and I wrote to him and told him so, and now he has come to take me away, to-morrow if need be, and there *is* need, for they are doing their best to kill me here—listen to the yelling in there—that's all about me. They are killing *him* too, on my account ; they are worrying him out of his life. And he is a father to me, I tell you,—yes—more, *far* more than a real father. I won't stay and see it any longer ; I know more about it than the others do, and I shall go away ~~to-morrow~~—to-morrow! Who knows, if I go away, perhaps, they may put off his marriage with Tatiana Ivanovna—there, I've told you all—tell *him* all I have told you, for I cannot get a chance of telling him myself. We are watched, especially by that *Perepischiyanin* ; tell him not to be anxious about *me*, for that I would rather live in a barn and feed on black bread than be ~~the~~ cause of all the worries he is now suffering on my account. I am a poor girl, and I know how to live as a poor girl ; but, gracious heavens! what

a dreadful noise—what on earth are they doing?—I must go and see at any cost. I shall go and tell them all I have told you, whatever happens,—I *must* do it—it is my duty—good-bye," and away she ran.

I stood rooted to the spot, fully conscious of the absurdity of the part which I had been obliged to play just now; how was it all to end? I was sorry for the poor girl, Nastia; and my heart bled for poor uncle. As I mused, Gavril suddenly appeared before me—he still had his unfortunate copy-book in his hand.

"Your uncle desires to see you," he said, humbly and dejectedly.

I started. "My uncle?" I said, "where is he—what are they doing?"

"In the tea-room, where you had tea this afternoon, sir."

"Who is with him?"

"He is alone, sir, and waiting."

"What, for me?"

"He has sent for Thomas Tomich. Our good days are done," added poor old Gavril, with a deep sigh.

"For Thomas Tomich, hm! and where are the others? Where is Mrs. General?"

"In her own apartments, in a swoon; she is lying unconscious and crying at the same time."

We walked along as we talked and had now reached the house; it was nearly dark in the garden. I found my uncle in the same room in which I had had my encounter with Thomas Tomich; he was walking up and down with long strides; seeing me he sprang to me and pressed both of my hands excitedly. He was very pale, and his breath seemed to come with difficulty; his hands shook and a nervous shiver seemed to run through his frame at regular intervals.

"*MY DEAR BOY*, it's all over, all settled!" he said, in a sort of tragic whisper.

"Uncle," I said, "I heard cries; what were they?"

"Cries, my dear fellow, I should think so, every kind of cry I should imagine. Mother's lying in a swoon still, but I don't care. I have made up my mind and I shall stick to it. I'm afraid of no one now. I intend to show them, Sergey, that I have some character. I sent for you on purpose to help me to show them this; it breaks my heart, my deaf boy, but I feel that I must act firmly now or never. Justice ~~must~~ be done."

"But do tell me what has happened, uncle?"

"I'm parting with Thomas," he said, in a tone of decision.

"Uncle!" I cried, in a transport of joy. "Why, you couldn't possibly have imagined a better thing, and if I can be of the slightest service to you in the matter—I am most heartily and completely at your disposal."

"Thanks! dear boy, thanks! but it's all settled now. I am waiting for Thomas, I have sent for him. Either he or I must go; we must part somehow. Either Thomas must leave this house to-morrow, or—I vow it—I will throw up everything and enter the hussars again—they'll take me in all right, I shall get a division. We must change all this now—here, what's this French copy-book for?" he continued, addressing Gavril, "throw it away—burn it. I am your master, and I command you not to learn the French language. See that you don't dare disobey me—for I am your master and not Thomas Tomich."

"Thank God!" ejaculated Gavril. Uncle was evidently in earnest.

"My dear boy," uncle continued with great feeling, "they want me to consent to what is impossible, you shall judge me—you shall stand between myself and them like an impassionate judge. You don't know—you don't know what they ask of me, it is opposed to all ideas of philanthropy and generosity and honour. I'll tell you all afterwards, but first—"

"My dear uncle, I know all," I cried, "I guess it; and besides I have just had a conversation with Nastia."

"My good fellow, not a word about that, not a word just now," he said hurriedly, and as though in some alarm. "I'll tell you all afterwards; but just now—well?" he cried, addressing Vidoplassoff who had entered the room at this moment. "Where's Thomas Tomich?"

Vidoplassoff brought the report that Thomas would not come, and was much put out with the request for his presence transmitted to him.

"Bring him here at once, carry him—use force if he won't come," cried my uncle, stamping his foot.

Vidoplassoff, who had never seen his master in a state of rage before, disappeared in terror: I was surprised myself, for I thought it must be something very important indeed—some dreadful provocation to have made a man of my uncle's gentle nature yield to such angry passions and to come to such resolutions as I had just witnessed.

My uncle marched up and down the room for some moments apparently in contest with himself.

"Better not tear up the copy-book, Gavril," he said, at last—"you may stay here, you may be of use to me. I think my dear fellow," he added, addressing me, "I think, perhaps, I shouted too angrily just now. One should do everything with dignity and manliness—but not with shouting and offensive language. Do you know, Sergey, I think perhaps you had better not be present—it shall be all the same to you, because I will tell you all about it afterwards; do you mind going out, old fellow, to oblige me?"

"You are sinking uncle, you are feeling remorse," I said, looking intently at him.

"No, no, not a bit of it," he cried with redoubled vivacity. "No, no, I'm not afraid of anything now. I have taken most decided steps—oh! you've no idea what they want of me, as if I could possibly consent to it—no, no, I'll show them what I am. But I was sorry I had sent for you, my boy, because it may be a painful interview for Thomas, and your presence would add to his humiliation. You see I want to send him forth generously and without humiliation of any kind—of course to do this properly is quite beyond my powers of eloquence—the most honeyed words would taste sour under the circumstances. I'm afraid I may make a mess of it and hurt his feelings, for which I should be very sorry, for he has done a good deal for me, after all. Go now, my dear fellow, here they come with Thomas—do go for goodness' sake! don't stay."

And uncle conducted me out on to the terrace at the very moment that Thomas entered by the door. However, I did not go away; I confess to having stayed on the terrace, where it was dark, in order to listen.

I do not justify this conduct on my part; but I may say, that—standing out there on the terrace for half an hour and succeeding as I did in getting the better of my temper—I con-

sider that I performed an act of heroism. From the spot where I stood I could not only hear every word, but—the door being glass—I could see capitally as well.

Imagine if you can, reader, Thomas Tomich, who has just been commanded to appear, with the threat of violence if the order were not complied with.

"Did my ears hear aright, colonel?" he asked, as he entered the room. "is it possible that you caused a threat to be transmitted to me? am I rightly informed?"

"Yes, yes, your ears heard all right, Thomas," said my uncle, bravely—"but come and talk the matter over seriously and friendly—come, sit down."

Thomas Tomich solemnly seated himself. Uncle walked nervously up and down the room, evidently at a loss how to begin.

"Let us be friendly, brotherly, Thomas," he began. "We are neither of us children; now, there are several matters upon which we shall never agree, Thomas—several matters—so, hadn't we better separate? I am quite sure that your instincts are noble, that you wish the well, and—but, why waste words, Thomas, I shall remain your firm friend for ever, and—and—here are fifteen thousand roubles, it is every copeak I can scrape together—take the money. I am bound, it is my solemn duty to provide for you—it is nearly all stock, very few notes—take it freely, you will not be under any obligation to me because I can never repay you for all you have done for me. Yes, yes, it's true, I know it too well, though we cannot agree upon certain important matters, still I quite realize my indebtedness to yourself. To-morrow, or next day, whenever it suits you, we will part; you must go to our little town, Thomas; it is but six or seven miles away; there is a little house—a pretty little house—down in the lane behind the church; it belongs to a widow and is for sale—it was just built for you, Thomas—and I'll buy it for you over and above this money. You'll be near us there; you can employ yourself with literature, science, philanthropy, you can win yourself a glorious name; the company there is very good and you shall come here on holidays and we'll all be as happy as the day is long—there! will you agree?"

"Oho!" I thought, "so that is uncle's way of kicking Thomas out! he said nothing about the money."

There was a long pause after uncle's speech. Thomas sat in his armchair like one suspended and stared intently and fixedly

at the colonel, who evidently felt considerably embarrassed both by the stare and by the silence.

"Money!" muttered Thomas at last, in a kind of artificially feeble voice. "Where is this money?—let me see it. Hand me this money, quick!"

"Here it is, Thomas, every copeak I can scrape up, exactly fifteen thousand you'll find it, notes and stock."

"Gavril, here, take this money," said Thomas, benignly. "You are an old man, it may be of use to you, and yet, no—" he cried, jumping up from his chair with a sort of shriek of rage, "no! give it me first, Gavril! Give me this money, give me these millions, that I may trample them underfoot! Give them here, and let me tear them, spit upon them, scatter them, and dishonour them! They offer ~~not~~ money, me! They bribe me to leave this house! Am I awake—have I really lived to see this hour of shame? Here—here is your money, look at it—there, and there! That's the sort of man Thomas Opuskin is, if you did not know him before!"

With these words, Thomas scattered the papers all over the room. It was a significant fact that he did not tear or spit upon a single note, as he had boasted. All he did was to crease them a little, and he did *that* very cautiously. Gavril sprawled about to pick them up, and afterwards carefully returned the packet to his master.

Thomas's action wrought a spell upon my uncle. He, in his turn, now stood speechless and stunned, with his mouth wide open. Thomas, meanwhile, re-seated himself, and panted as though in inexpressible agitation.

"You are a splendid fellow, Thomas!" cried uncle at last. "You are the very noblest of mankind."

"I know that," replied Thomas. His voice sounded weak, but his dignity was indescribable.

"Thomas, forgive me. I have been a scoundrel before you."

"Yes, before my face," Thomas assented.

"Thomas," continued my uncle in ecstacy, "it is not your generosity which surprises me, but the fact that I can have been so blind, so stupid, so base, as to offer you money under these circumstances. But, Thomas, on one point, you are wrong. I was ~~now~~ wishing you to leave the house. I assure you solemnly that I was ~~simply~~ anxious that you should not be in need when you left the house. I swear it, Thomas! I am ready to im-

plore your forgiveness on my knees—on my knees, Thomas—if you but say the word.”

“I don’t want your knees, colonel.” *

“But think, Thomas! think! I was bewildered, I was beside myself. Tell me, only tell me, how I may wipe out this offence, suggest something—tell me!”

“You cannot, colonel; and you may rest assured that tomorrow I shall shake off the dust from my feet at your threshold.”

Thomas here rose from his chair, but my uncle rushed to him, and forced him to sit down again.

“No, no, Thomas, you shall not go; it’s no use your talking about the dust from your feet. You shall not stir from here, or if you do, I shall follow you, and I shall go where you go, and stop where you stop, and never leave you until you have forgiven me. I swear it, Thomas.”

“You wish me to forgive you, and you are guilty—but do you realise *how* guilty—towards me? Are you aware that you are to blame for ever having given me a piece of bread to eat? Do you understand that in this one moment of time you have poisoned every crust of bread that I have ever partaken of in the past time under this roof? Do you see that by your act you have shown me that you considered me a slave, a flunkey, in your house? and I fondly imagined that I was dwelling with you as a friend—as a brother. How many thousand times have you accused me of this? Why did you spread this net, into which I have now floundered so surely? Why could you not have killed me at a blow long since? Why didn’t you wring my neck like some wretched cock, killed because he can’t lay eggs? Good gracious, colonel, did you ever hear of money payments to a friend upon such a plea as yours? ‘Take it, and get out of my sight,’ that’s what it amounts to! You thought I thirsted for your gold, but my one thought was pure, angelic desire and longing for your welfare. Oh! how you have torn my heart-strings, how you have played with my tenderest feelings, and ruthlessly trampled upon my purest affections. I have seen it coming, colonel, and for this your bread has turned to ashes in my mouth, and your sugar has become as cayenne pepper to my palate. No, colonel, leave me alone, let me go on my lonely way, with my wallet on my back. You shall not be longer annoyed with my hated presence. So be it, colonel.”

"No, no, Thomas, it cannot and shall not be!" cried poor uncle in the extremity of woe.

"Yes, colonel, yes, it shall and must be so. To-morrow I leave this house. Carpet the road from here to Moscow with your rouble notes if you will, and I shall walk proudly and contemptuously upon your lucre. This foot shall trample dishonour and bruise it, and Thomas Opuiskin shall rest satisfied with the consciousness of his own innate virtue. I have said all, I have to say. Good-bye, colonel—good-bye, colonel!"

And again Thomas tried to rise.

"Forgive me, forgive me, Thomas, and forget," entreated poor uncle.

"'Forgive!' and why do you need my forgiveness? Of course, as a Christian, I must and do forgive you. I have nearly forgiven you already; but, judge for yourself, would it be consistent with common-sense and honour for me to remain a single moment in your house? Why, you turned me out!"

"Yes, yes, Thomas, believe me, quite consistent."

"Consistent, indeed! Why, there is no equality between us now. I have overwhelmed and crushed you to the earth by my generosity, and you have crushed yourself by the baseness of your action. You are abased, and I am exalted. Where is the equality? and is it possible that friendship should exist without such equality? This is the bitter cry of my heart, mind, not a triumphant paean over your discomfiture."

"Oh! Thomas, my heart has a bitter cry of its own, too, I assure you."

"And this is the man," continued Thomas, in tones of angelic sweetness, "for whose sake I have spent many a sleepless night. Oh! how often, at deep night, I have risen and lit my candle, and said to myself, 'Now he is asleep, Thomas, confiding in you. Don't you fall asleep, Thomas—keep awake! Perhaps you may yet think of one more thing for the happiness of this man.' That is how Thomas has passed his sleepless nights, colonel; and how does that man repay him? But enough, enough!"

"Oh, Thomas, I will earn your friendship—I will, indeed—I swear it!"

"You swear it, but what guarantee have I? As a Christian, I shall love you, and do; but, as a man, I shall despise you. I must, I must—in the name of morality—I must despise you, because, as you say, you have abased yourself, while my

generosity has exalted me. Which of your other friends would have refused this money as I did—as I, ‘the poor,’ despised Thomas did just now? No, no, colonel; in order to regain equality with me, you must perform feats of virtue and self-denial—and what sort of feats are you capable of when you cannot bring yourself to make the insignificant sacrifice of obliging me by addressing me as ‘your excellency,’ as you would a general?”

“Oh, but, Thomas, wasn’t that a little *too* much to ask?”

“And are you aware, sir, that by refusing me this tribute or indulgence, you dishonour me, in that you do not understand my motives and therefore put me down as a fool and a madman? As if I don’t know that it would be absurd of me to claim general’s rank—I, who despise all these ranks and humbug, and who would not accept a general’s title, ~~without~~ virtue, for untold millions! And you and your ‘scholars’ put me down a fool! Know, then, that for the increase and welfare of your wisdom and moral sense, I have determined, in spite of my own feelings in the matter, to call upon you for the sacrifice of yourself, entailed in according to me the title of a general. I wish to convince you that rank, without virtue, is but a tinkling cymbal. But you have always vaunted your rank of colonel over me, and therefore you find it difficult to bring yourself to calling me ‘your excellency.’ That’s where the shoe pinches—that you are ‘colonel’ and I am only poor Thomas!”

“No, no, Thomas—I assure you, you are an educated man, and I respect you.”

“Oh, you respect me, do you? Then kindly explain wherein I am unworthy of a general’s style and title? Answer me plainly now—am I worthy of it, or not? I wish to gauge your intellect and enlightenment by your reply.”

“As far as honesty, intellect, disinterestedness, and nobility of soul go, you are all worthy,” replied Uncle, proudly.

“Oh! then if that is the case, why cannot you call me ‘your excellency?’”

“Well, Thomas, perhaps I will say it—”

“But I insist, yes, I insist upon it, sir. I see how difficult it is for you to consent to this self-denial, and therefore I insist upon your doing it. Such a piece of self-denial will be the first step towards those feats of sacrifice which are to atone for the past, and to replace you ~~upon~~ in equality with me. Re-

member, you must absolutely reorganise yourself before I can believe in your sincerity."

" Well, to-morrow, I'll call you 'your excellency!'"

" No, no, not to-morrow. To-morrow can take care of itself. I insist upon your calling me 'your excellency' now, at once."

" Very well, very well, Thomas, I consent; but look here, what am I to say? How am I to bring it in at once?"

" And pray, why not? I see, you are ashamed to do it. Very well, if you are ashamed, I take it as an insult, and—"

" Wait, wait, Thomas! I'm quite ready, I'm proud to say it; but how am I to bring it in—just anyhow? 'How d'ye do, your excellency!' it sounds so ridiculous like that."

" No, no, we want no 'how d'ye do' about it at all; and I don't want that offensive tone you are pleased to put on; you are reducing the matter to a game or a farce, and I will not permit any buffoonery where I am concerned; do not forget yourself, colonel, if you please. Now then, a different tone—"

" Thomas, aren't you joking?"

" In the first place, not 'Thomas' please; but 'Thomas Tomich,' don't forget that, please; then, you find it difficult to add the words 'your excellency' to any sentence. Very well, I will help you to solve the difficulty. Now then, say after me 'your excellency,'"

" Well then, 'your excellency.'"

" No, sir, not 'well then' at all, simply 'you excellency' and nothing more; I warn you, colonel, you must change your tone; and don't take it amiss if I ask you to bow slightly at the words and bend your body a little forward in token of respect and deference towards the person addressed, and of your willingness to take wings and fly at his bidding. I tell you, I have been in society. I know well enough how these things ought to be done. Now then, 'your excellency'!"

" Your excellency."

" How unspeakably gratified I am to have, at length, the opportunity of asking your pardon in that I did not at first comprehend the drift of your excellency's mind. I promise, for the future, to avoid any opposition of my feeble might to the welfare of humanity in general: there, say that."

Poor uncle! he was made to repeat all this nonsense, word for word, after his master. I stood and blushed as I listened. I was overwhelmed with helpless rage.

" There," said his inquisitor, after the repetition: " now don't

you feel a lightness and buoyancy about the heart, as though an angel had floated down and settled within your soul? Do you feel the presence of such an angel? answer me."

" Well, Thomas, I certainly do feel a bit lighter at heart—"

" Just as though your heart, after this victory over yourself, had been dipped in some soothing oil, eh?"

" Well, yes—a sort of buttery feeling—it works easier!"

" Buttery! good heavens! however, never mind now; that's the effect of doing your duty, you ~~see~~ colonel." Be assured, my dear sir, you are selfish—dreadfully selfish."

" I know it, I know it, Thomas," said uncle, sighing.

" An egotist, of the darkest kind."

" I know it—it's true, Thomas. I have seen it, ever since you came."

" Be gentler, kinder, more sympathetic with others, forget yourself—live and let live! Let these be your rules of life, as they are mine. Bear, and work, and hope, and pray—those are the great truths which I long to teach to all humanity. Learn this and I am all yours, and will be the first to open all my heart to you and to weep on your bosom—"

" It's all true, Thomas, and I am to blame at every turn; but you see, it was my bringing up—I have been so much among soldiers; and yet I swear to you, Thomas, I am not without my feelings. I remember when I left the hussars the whole regiment was in tears and told me they would never have another chief like myself. It made me hope that I was not all lost."

" The old egotism again! Once more I catch you in the very act of self praise. Don't you see that you are *reproaching me* with these hussars' tears?"

" I'm sorry, Thomas—I couldn't help it—I was thinking of the good old times."

" 'Good times' don't fall down from heaven, we work them out ourselves, the seed of them is in ~~the~~ hearts. Why am I always happy, in spite of my sufferings? Why am I always beloved by all—excepting perhaps fools and some scholars! I hate fools—and scholars are nothing else. What did *he* say this afternoon? get him here, bring him in, I'll refute every word he can say."

" Of course, Thomas, of course. Nobody doubts that!" —

" Why, just now, at tea, I proved myself intellectual enough, surely; I showed talent—colossal knowledge; I proved how

even a trivial subject, such as the Kamarinsky can be transformed into a topic fit and worthy of great minds ; and do you suppose that fellow appreciated me ? Not a bit of it. I daresay he has taken the opportunity, already, to inform you that I know nothing ; for all they know I may be a second Machiavelli among them—and they are none the wiser ; and why ? because I am poor and unknown. Poor ! Humbug ! Then who's this Koroskin I heard mentioned ?

“ Oh, Thomas, a splendid fellow—a man of science—you'll like him.”

“ Hm ! I doubt it ; probably one of those asses laden with books so common in these days. They have no souls, colonel, and no hearts. What's the use of knowledge without virtue ? But enough of this.” Thomas rose : “ I cannot entirely forgive you yet, colonel, the offence was too bitter ; but I will pray, and perhaps heaven will shed balm upon the wounded heart. We will speak about all this to-morrow. Let us go now, I am tired and weak.”

“ Of course you are, Thomas, of course. Look here, won't you have something to eat, I'll order it at once—”

“ To eat ! ” cried Thomas, laughing contemptuously. “ I am given poison to drink, and then asked to 'eat something,' to heal my heart's wounds with a beefsteak or stewed apples. Oh, colonel, colonel, what a dreadful materialist you are ! Well, well ! now, go to your mother, fall on your knees, and sob, and weep, and pray, till she forgives you. This is your simple duty.”

“ Oh, Thomas, I am ready to kneel before her all night. I can think of nothing else at this moment ; but reflect, Thomas, reflect what I am asked to do. It is *too* much, Thomas—think over it. Be *altogether* noble—make me *perfectly* happy while you are about it, and think this matter over impartially, give it in my favour, and I promise—”

“ No, no, colonel—that is not my affair. You know your mother's wishes, and depend upon it she has your welfare at heart ; I have nothing whatever to do with this question. I stand aside. Now go to your parent, and as for me, I will pray for you all night—it is long, indeed, since I have known what sleep is. Farewell ! I forgive you too, old man (to Gavril), and if I have hurt your feelings, you must forgive me also. I know you were not acting on your own initiative. Good night, both of you, and may God bless you all.”

Thomas went out I rushed into the room.

"You have been listening," cried uncle.

"Yes, uncle—and you could bring yourself to call him our excellency?"

"And why not, my dear fellow? I am proud of the act of self denial. But what a ~~scoundrel~~ what a disinterested fellow he is, Sergey—you heard? How could I have been such a fool about that money? Oh, my dear boy—how I have wronged him, systematically wronged him! I see it all now. Did you notice his angelic expression of face when he refused the money?"

"Very well, uncle; very well. Be as proud of your self-denial as you please; but I'm off. Just tell me, first, in plain words, what you want of me; if you do not require my presence, I shall go to-night—I cannot stand this sort of spectacle again—I shall go . . . "

"My dear fellow," cried my uncle, "just wait *two* minutes, let me go to my mother, and finish off this business first—it is so important; go over to your place for a few minutes—in the summer wing—Gavril will show you the way,—and I'll just go to mother, and beg her forgiveness and arrange one thing—I have made up my mind what to do—and then, I'll come and tell you every little detail about everything—you shall hear all Oh dear! oh dear! I suppose we, shall see good times again some day. Just *two* minutes!"

He pressed my hand and rushed away. There was nothing to be done but to go off with Gaynor, as he suggested.

THE summer wing, to which Gavrila conducted me, was a neat little house of four well-furnished rooms built into the garden, and some yards away from the main structure. On entering my room I caught sight of a letter on the table, addressed to myself, and reading "The Lamentation of Vido-plassoff" In spite of all my efforts I could not make head or tail of the contents, which seemed to be the most incomprehensible trash written in flowery footman's phraseology, and to consist

of a long-winded request to myself to assist Vidoplassoff in something or other upon which his happiness depended. I was still trying to read the letter when the door opened and Misinchikoff came in.

"I hope you will permit me to make your better acquaintance?" he began, speaking freely but with perfect courtesy of manner, and taking my hand. "I had no opportunity of speaking to you before; but I felt, at first sight, that I should like to know you better."

Of course I replied that I was delighted, and so on; but in point of fact I could not have felt more disinclined for his company. We sat down.

"What have you there?" he asked, looking at the paper I was reading; "is it 'Vidoplassoff's Lamentations'?" Ah, I thought so. He sent me just such another document when I came. I thought he would attack you too. The fact is, you will see plenty of strange things in this house, and you had better make up your mind to be astonished at nothing. There is a good deal to laugh at here."

"Only to laugh at?"

"Well, surely you would not weep? I'll tell you Vidoplassoff's history, if you like, and I wager anything that you'll laugh over that."

"I confess I don't feel much inclined for Vidoplassoff and his affairs just now," I said, in a tone of annoyance. It was very clear that Misinchikoff had not come to me for nothing—he wanted something out of me,—that was the meaning of his politeness at this moment. He had been as sulky as possible in the tea-room, now he was all smiles and small-talk. Misinchikoff was evidently a gentleman who was thoroughly master of himself, and who understood human nature into the bargain.

"That damnable Thomas," I cried, striking my fist on the table. "I bet anything he is at the bottom of every bit of mischief that goes on in the place, curse him."

"I think you are a little too angry with him," insinuated Misinchikoff.

"Too angry?" I cried. "Of course I made a fool of myself at tea and put myself into the wrong, I remember that well enough; but think of the provocation! Why, this is simply a mad-house; and—well, I can't stand it; I shall go."

"Do you smoke?" asked Misinchikoff, coolly.

"Yes."

"Then, you won't object to my lighting up—they don't allow it up there. I quite agree with you," he added, lighting a cigarette, "that all this is very like a mad-house; but don't suppose I condemn your exhibition of temper, for I myself should have been three times as wild under the circumstances."

"How was it, then, that you did not stand up for poor uncle?" I said. "I confess, I thought you remarkably cool and collected during the painful scene—and—well, I considered it strange, at least."

"You are right, your uncle is good and kind; but I did not take his part, firstly because it would not have been seemly to do so—it would have been, as it were, a humiliation towards him; and, besides, I should have been kicked out of the house to-morrow, if I had, and I tell you candidly that my present circumstances are such that I am obliged to value the hospitality of this mansion."

"Well, I know nothing about that, of course; but, since you have been in the house a month, perhaps you can explain this phenomenon: I have just seen Thomas Tomich refuse an offer of fifteen thousand roubles; he had the money in his hand. I saw this with my own eyes."

"What! impossible! Explain, for goodness' sake."

I told him the story, omitting that part which concerned "your excellency." Misinchikoff listened hungrily. His expression changed as I spoke of the fifteen thousand roubles.

"Well," he said, "I should not have thought it of Thomas. However, of course, he refused fifteen thousand roubles in order to wait a little and take thirty thousand later on, and yet I don't know," he continued, thoughtfully. "I rather doubt it, after all. The fellow is a sort of poet. There's no knowing why he acts as he does. The fact is, he does whatever panders best to his inordinate and preposterous conceit."

Misinchikoff was angry and annoyed. I watched the man with great curiosity.

"Yes. We shall be having great changes here," he added, thoughtfully. "The colonel is ready to kneel and pray to Thomas now. Probably, he'll end by marrying out of pure obedience and gentleness of heart," he muttered through his teeth.

"Do you mean to say you really think this abominable, unnatural union between uncle and that old idiot will come off?"

He looked at me inquisitively.

"Scoundrels!" I exclaimed passionately.

"And yet," observed Minchikoff, "their idea is sensible enough. They wish him to do something for the family."

"As if he has not done enough for them already!" I cried with great irritation. "And you can bring yourself to say that you consider a marriage with that drivelling idiot a 'sensible idea.'"

"Of course, I quite agree with you that she is a fool; and—well, it's nice of you to be so fond of your uncle; but, in point of fact, her money would be a very pretty little ornament to the estate. And, besides, they have other reasons; they are afraid of the colonel marrying the governess—you saw that interesting-looking little girl?"

"But, is that likely—is it likely?" I asked in a state of extreme agitation. "Surely it's merely a trumped-up story? Do tell me; I am deeply interested."

"Well, of course, he's over head and ears in love, there's no question of *that*; but he hides it."

"He hides it? do you really think so? and she—is she in love with him?"

"Oh, very probably. Why, of course, it would be a capital thing for her to marry him—she's very poor."

"Yes, but upon what grounds do you base your opinion that they love each other?"

"Why, how can anyone, of ordinary observation avoid seeing it? Besides, I believe they have secret rendezvous. It is said that there is a—well—an illicit intimacy between them, but don't let this go any further. I tell you in the strictest secrecy."

"Good heavens, it's impossible!" I cried, "and you mean to say you ~~can~~ believe this nonsense?"

"Of course, I can't be sure of it—how can I?—but I think it quite possible."

"Possible—how? Consider uncle's generosity and strict sense of honour."

"I do consider it; but very likely he intends to marry the girl afterwards. This is often done. However, I don't, in the least, insist upon the truth of the story, especially since I know that there was once a report in circulation that she was in love with Vidoplassoff."

"There, you see; with Vidoplassoff! Good heavens, man! and do you tell me that you could believe *that*?"

"But I tell you, my dear sir, I don't believe implicitly in any such reports," replied Misinchikoff, coolly. "However, as you seem very much in earnest, I may tell you that there is very little probability as to the truth of the report concerning her attachment to Vidoplassoff. Miss Peroplitsin spreads these stories. The fact is, she had set her cap at the colonel herself (on the plea that she is a major's daughter), and is wild with him because he won't look at her. I hate scandal, and, besides, we are wasting very valuable time. I came here with a special request."

"A request, to me? Excuse me, but how can I possibly be of any service to you?"

"Oh, I daresay I shall be able to interest you a good deal. You love your uncle, and are much interested in anything that concerns his projected marriage. But, first, I must beg one thing, as a preliminary. Whether you grant my request or not, in any case will you promise me that whatsoever passes between us now shall rest in the most absolute secrecy, and that you will, under no circumstances, either divulge my secret or make use of the idea I shall now give you for your own profit; will you promise me this, as a preliminary?"

All this was very solemn. I agreed.

"Very well. The secret is a very simple affair," he continued. "In a word, I wish to carry off Tatiana Ivanovna and marry her privately—in fact, a sort of Gretna Green business. Do you follow me?"

I stared blankly at Misinchikoff, speechless with astonishment.

"I confess," I said at last, "I don't understand you; and since I believe that I am talking to a reasonable human being, I do not see how you—"

"In fact, in plain words, both I and any project are very foolish; is that it? Don't be afraid of speaking out. I don't mind. I admit, if you like, that at first my idea may sound strange to you; but, if you will consider a moment, you'll find that it is very far from foolish—that it is distinctly reasonable and expedient, in fact. If you will listen one moment to my explanation—"

"Oh, of course, I shall hear it with the greatest curiosity."

"Very well. There's very little to tell, however. You see, at this moment, I am deeply in debt and have not a cent of ready money. I have a sister, too, who is equally poor, and is

living more or less in a menial position; nineteen years old, she is, and an orphan. Our poverty is my fault, for we inherited a small property of forty souls—and I—well, I'm ashamed to say it, but I drank and played it away. Now, however, I want to turn over a new leaf; and for this purpose, I must have a hundred thousand roubles. As I have no hope of making this sum out of any kind of service, there remain but two ways of obtaining the money—I must either marry it or steal it. I came here on foot and with hardly a shoe to my feet. My little sister gave me her last three roubles when I left Moscow. Arrived here, I saw Tatiana Ivanovna, and immediately I had an idea. I made up my mind to sacrifice myself and marry her. Now, you must admit that this was very far from unreasonable, especially as I am doing it more for my sister than myself."

"Excuse me a moment. You intend to make a formal proposal for this lady, Tatiana Ivanovna?"

"Heaven forbid! I should get kicked out of the house at once, and she herself would never so accept me. But if I suggest an elopement, and so on, she will agree like a shot. What she requires is something romantic and effective. Of course I should marry her legally, at once, but the thing is to get her out of this place first."

"But why do you feel so sure that she will consent to run away with you?"

"Oh, bless your heart, there's no doubt about that. Why, the basis of the whole plan is that Tatiana would be delighted to carry on a flirtation with anybody who chose to try her; that's why I made you promise not to use my idea for your own benefit. You can well understand that I should be worse than a fool if I did not take this chance while I have it, and especially under my present circumstances."

"Then, of course, she's quite mad, is she? I beg your pardon. I forgot. How stupid of me to speak so, since you are an aspirant for her hand—most awkward and indelicate!"

"Oh, het a'z, don't mind me. You ask whether she is mad; it is difficult to say, since she is not in a lunatic asylum. I suppose we may say that she is ~~not~~ mad, nor do I see anything very insane about her mania for love affairs; she is a good, honest woman. You see, she has been very poor from her birth until lately; her heart is a soft one, and for years she cherished sweet dreams and hopes of wedded love and so on, and no one

proposed to her. Then this fortune was left her, unexpectedly (quite enough to turn *anyone's* head), and all her hopes and dreams sprang forth anew. That story she told this afternoon about a young fellow in a white waistcoat was literally true. You can judge from that that my estimate of the woman's character is pretty correct. You can attract her at once with an ode or a billet-doux ; if you go and serenade her with a guitar, you can do what you like with her. I made a trial and was immediately accorded a secret rendezvous.

"In four or five days the thing must be done ; I must begin my odes and sighs at once ; I can play the guitar and sing very decently. I shall have an appointment at night in the summer house, and at dawn a carriage shall be in waiting for us ; we shall just jump in and drive off. I shall have her taken care of by some friends I know, near here, and in three days we shall be married. Of course money is required for all this, but I think I can do it on five hundred roubles, and this much I shall be able to borrow from the colonel. He will give it to me at once, not knowing what it's for. Now, then, do you understand me ?"

"Yes, I understand well enough," I said, "but what can I do in the matter ?"

"Oh, my dear sir, a great deal, I assure you ; at the house of those friends I mentioned, and here and everywhere, and then as a witness, my dear fellow. I shall feel like a man without hands if you don't help !"

"Another question : why did you make up your mind to ask me to help you ; a man whom you do not know and have hardly seen for an hour in your life ?"

"Your question is most welcome," said Mr. Misinchikoff, politely, "because it gives me the opportunity of assuring you of my regard for your person."

"Oh, you do me too much honour."

"No, no, not at all. You see, I have studied you a little already ; you are inquisitive, and rather young ; but I feel that once having given your word as to anything, you will stick to it. You are not an Obnoskin. Secondly, you are honest and will not utilize my idea, unless, of course, you like to make a friendly arrangement with me ; in the latter case I should be ready to give over my idea to you, that is---Tatiana Ivanovna ; and would even help you to carry it all out, on the understanding that I am to have fifty thousand roubles within one month of the

wedding, until payment of which I shall hold your I.O.U. without interest."

"What," I cried, "you are offering her to *me*?"

"Naturally, I would give her over to you in case of need. I should be a loser by it, of course, but—well, I shall get my money for the idea at all events."

"All I can say is—I shall certainly keep your secret; but as to being your partner in this affair, I must tell you that I can't consent."

"Why not?"

"Gracious heavens! don't you see that such an act as you meditate is most ignoble? I daresay your estimate of the young woman's love-mania and foolishness is quite correct; but that fact ought to restrain you as an honest man. You allow yourself that she is worthy of all esteem, and then you suddenly take advantage of her misfortunes in order to squeeze a hundred thousand roubles out of her. Of course you will not be a real bona-fide husband and do your duty by her; you will certainly ruin her—in fact, I cannot understand how you can have applied to me to help you in such a dirty business."

"Good heavens! what romanticism," cried Misinchikoff, gazing at me in undisguised astonishment; "but the thing is, you don't understand the matter a bit. Why, my good sir, the whole profit will go to *her*, not to *me*. Just consider."

"Oh, of course—looked at from your point of view—I have no doubt that in marrying poor Tatiana, you are doing a great and noble deed," I said with a sarcastic smile.

"A great and noble deed, undoubtedly. Why, I am sacrificing myself in order to be her husband—is that nothing? Then again, though she certainly has a great deal more, I have determined just to take one hundred thousand roubles, and never to touch another copeck of hers, all my life—is *that* nothing? Then think of the dangers she runs here even in this honest household—they only keep her because they are speculating upon getting hold of her money. I wish to save her from the danger of being made love to by every adventurer and speculator about the place who happens to have a guitar, and a voice, and a pair of moustaches—like Gnoskin for instance. As soon as she marries me she is safe. I shall put her into a comfortable house in Moscow, with my sister to look after her; she will have plenty of money, and we shall be as happy as larks—balls, concerts, masquerades—anything she

likes—even love-making, if she pleases, only it mustn't go too far.

"Anybody can insult her now, but once she has my name (Misinchikoff), I shall know how to keep that name in her person, free from insult. Is that worth nothing? Of course I shall not live with her, she shall be in Moscow and I in Petersburg; it would never suit her character to be continually with me and under the constant necessity of sober conjugal behaviour. I shall come down and see her occasionally—once a year or so—but not to get money, I assure you. I've told you before that I shall not touch a copeck after the first hundred thousand roubles. I shall stay a couple of days with her, perhaps three, and we shall laugh and tell stories and be as jolly as possible together, flirting and singing love songs and all that; and I shall carry on a loving correspondence with her. She will be in ecstacies over her affectionate, romantic husband. I tell you I shall captivate Tatiana's heart entirely in this way—it will be heaven on earth, my dear sir. What better destiny could she hope for?"

I listened silently and with some surprise. It was evidently useless to argue with Misinchikoff; he was so fanatically convinced of the righteousness, nay—of the sublimity of his project, that his words partook of the ecstasy of genius. However, there remained one delicate point which must be touched upon before the subject could be allowed to drop.

"Have you reflected," I inquired, "that she is very nearly the affianced bride of my uncle? Your elopement would be the greatest offence and insult to him; you would be carrying her away almost on the eve of the wedding day, not to mention the fact that you intend to borrow the money needed for your elopement from the very man who was to have been her bridegroom."

"Ah, there I have you!" cried Misinchikoff excitedly. "I expected your objection—it's all right; firstly your uncle has not proposed to her as yet, therefore I am not supposed to know anything about it. Again, I have had this invention for weeks, before there was any suspicion of their marriage; consequently I have a pull over him morally, for it is he who is robbing me, not I, who am robbing him of a wife, for remember, I have enjoyed secret rendezvous with the lady. Lastly, you yourself, were in dismay at the idea of your uncle marrying Tatiana a moment or two since, and now you suddenly find out

that I am doing the family an injury in depriving the colonel of his intended wife. Why, good heavens! my dear sir, I am doing your uncle the greatest service possible—I am *saving* him, don't you see that? I am *saving* him. He loathes the idea of this union, and, besides, he is in love with another girl. What sort of a wife would Tatiana make him? it's absurd! She would have to be told not to throw rosebuds to young men any more—absurd. But let me carry her off, and not Mrs. General or Thomas or anyone else can do anything; they can't bring her back after that—that would be a little too strong! Well, isn't it a favour, isn't it *downtight salvation* I am bringing to your uncle?"

I am bound to confess that the last consideration weighed heavily with me.

"And what if he proposes to-morrow?" I asked. "It will be too late then—for she will be his formal *fiancée*."

"Of course, but we must so arrange that his proposal does *not* come off to-morrow. Why do you suppose I am asking your help? because I cannot manage it alone; but together with you I can prevent your uncle proposing to-morrow. We must oppose it with all our might, and in case of need give Thomas Tomich a good hiding in order to distract the attention of the household and provide them something else to think of. Of course this latter step would be our last resort, and I put it forward merely as a suggestion; so that—there, you see now how much I require your assistance?"

"One last question. Have you told anybody of your intentions besides myself?"

Misinchikoff scratched his head and made a face.

"I confess," he said, "this question is worse than the nastiest pill to me. The fact is, I *have* told somebody, like a born idiot as I was; and who do you think it was?—Obnoskin. I can't think how I can have done it. You see, he was always about the place, and I didn't know much about him, and when I was first inspired with my grand idea, and was in a sort of fever of excitement, feeling that I should require an assistant, I asked him. It's unpardonable of me, unpardonable."

"Why, what of Obnoskin?"

"Oh! he agreed, delightedly, and disappeared next day. Two or three days after, he reappears with his mother, and not a word does he say to me. He even avoids me, and seems to be afraid of something. I know what's up well enough. He

simply told his mother every word, and now they are spying on me together."

"But what are you afraid of? What can they do?"

"Oh! they can't do much; but they might make a mess of the thing somehow—ask for silence money very likely, for instance; but I can't afford them much. I have decided that already. Three thousand roubles, perhaps, not a copeck more. There are all sorts of expenses, the hundred thousand won't go so very far. However, the Obnoskins have gone away just now."

"Gone?" I said. "Why, they were—"

"Yes, I know. They went directly after tea, and the devil go with them! They'll be here again to-morrow, you'll see. Well, then, do you agree?"

"I confess," I said, "I really don't know what to say. Of course, I'll keep your secret. I'm not an Obnoskin, but I don't think you'll get much help out of me."

"I see," said Misinchikoff, rising, "that you haven't had enough of Thomas and Mis General yet, and that much as you love your good old uncle, you are willing to see him tormented out of his life for another period of time. You are new here, but—patience. Wait till to-morrow, think it over, and you'll see. I shall have your help all right. Why, otherwise, your uncle is *done for*—do you understand?—ruined. They'll make him marry this woman. Don't forget, he is to propose to her to morrow. We shall be too late. You should really decide to-day."

"Believe me, I wish you all success; but as for helping you, I really don't see how I—"

"I know, I know. Well, we'll leave it until to-morrow," said Misinchikoff smiling rather mockingly. "*La nuit porte conseil.* Good night! I shall come here early, and talk it over again—think it over." He turned and left the room, whistling.

I went out soon after him for a breath of fresh air. The moon was not up yet; it was dark, and the air was close; the leaves on the trees were motionless. ~~Despite~~ of my fatigue, I felt that I must walk up and down a little; but I had not gone ten paces when I suddenly heard my uncle's voice. He had come to the door of the house, and was talking excitedly to some one. I went up, and called out to him. He was with Vidoplassoff.

XI.

"UNCLE," I said, "at last! I have been waiting ever so long."

"I know, I know," he replied. "I'm coming; just let me finish with Vidoplassoff."

"Oh, nonsense, uncle. Drop Vidoplassoff, and come along."

"Just five or ten minutes. I wish you could have chosen another time though, Vidoplassoff," said my uncle.

"As if you couldn't put him off, uncle!" I cried. "What is it—what does he want?" I continued, as we entered a room.

"Why, you see, he doesn't like his name, and wants to change it. What do you think, now? What's to be done?"

"His name? Well, uncle," I cried, in downright amazement, "before I hear what he has to say for himself, allow me to tell you that only in your house could such nonsensical humbug be permitted for a moment."

"Oh, my dear boy, it's no use being annoyed or disgusted. First of all talk to him yourself. He's been at us for the last two months about it."

"My name is such a ramshackle one," observed Vidoplassoff.

"Ramshackle? Why so?" I inquired in amazement.

"So, sir, it contains everything that's abominable in it?"

"How abominable? Besides, how can you change it? Who has a right to change your name for you? I suppose your father had it before you?"

"That's the abomination of it. Why should I be made to suffer eternally for my father, and to bear insults and gibes all my life for his name?"

"I'd bet anything that Thomas Tomich has his finger in this pie, uncle," I cried.

"No, no, my boy, not a bit. Thomas does patronise the fellow certainly; in fact, he is Thomas's secretary, and Thomas has certainly enlightened him and educated him considerably, but—"

"I dare say you're right," interrupted Vidoplassoff. "Thomas Tomich is my protector. He has taught me what a worm I am, and of what little significance in the world."

"You see, Sergey, it was like this," said uncle. "He lived at Moscow as a boy, and learned illuminating and ornate calligraphy. You should see how beautifully he does it—gold, red and blue, and Cupids, and things round—lovely. Iliusha learnt from him—a rouble and a half a lesson—and so do several people living around. Thomas fixed the price. Well, besides that, he writes poetry—"

"Poetry? It needed but that!" I exclaimed.

"Yes, my boy, poetry, and good stuff, too. Versification, you know, and all that. He describes anything you like in verse. Thomas corrects it all for him, and says that the man's mind is becoming more and more enlightened, and that he feels the noblest sentiments of independence, and all that sort of thing. I wanted to give him his freedom, but Thomas says *no*! It's good to have a poet among one's serfs, says he, it looks well. The worst of it is, since he has become a poet he won't look at the other servants. (Don't be offended, Vidoplassoff, I speak to you as a father.) He was engaged to be married to one of them, Matréona, a charming girl, but he has thrown her up now. He won't have a word to say to her—"

"By Thomas Tomich's advice, sir, my real benefactor," said Vidoplassoff.

"Of course. How can anything be done without Thomas?" I cried involuntarily.

"No, no, Sergey, don't!" said uncle. "The thing is, this Matréona has revenged herself by setting all the rest of them against him, and they have invented some detestable rhyme or other on his name, so he wants to change it. He says he has suffered enough from his name—"

"It's a hateful name," Vidoplassoff cut in.

"The thing is, that if he prints his poems, as Thomas intends, his name may possibly damage the chance of the book."

"Oh! he intends to print them, does he?" I remarked.

"Yes, oh yes; I am going to pay for the book; and it is to be dedicated to Thomas, with the author's deep gratitude for his education. Thomas is to write the dedication himself. Well, imagine a title page with the heading 'Vidoplassoff's Works!'"

"'The Lamentations of Vidoplassoff,'" corrected that genius.

"Well, 'Lamentations,' then. Think of the effect. Why, critics are said to be such mockers. They'll all laugh at his

name. They'll cut him up for his name. I say he ought to write under a pseudonym ; but no, says he, he must have a real new name, and everybody must call him by it now and forever."

" And I wager you've agreed to it, uncle ? "

" Well, just to avoid disagreeables, I have ; and we have been a week choosing a name. We've tried Oleandrof and Tulipoff and Vearney. (He threw up the last because they rhymed on it too easily.) Then he wanted to be Ulánoff. He has been bothering me for a week about this absurd name—Ulánoff. He has spoiled all the walls and window-panes scribbling it over them, and has wasted a whole quire of good paper scrawling it about with flourishes. Then he tried another, for they rhymed on Ulánoff too. What was your next, Vidoplassoff ? I forget."

" Tantseff, I think it was, sir."

" Yes, Tantseff it was, and I bet you he has come with a new one again to-day ? "

" I have, sir. ' Essbouquetoff.' "

" Aren't you ashamed of yourself, sir, taking a name from a scent-bottle or pomatum pot, and you call yourself a wise man ! Why, that name's printed on scent-bottles," said uncle.

" For goodness sake, uncle," I whispered, " get rid of this fool, and let's attend to business."

" Look here, Vidoplassoff," said my uncle, " I really haven't time now. I'll attend to you to-morrow. I promise you I will, but go now, and leave me alone. Stop, what is Thomas 'Tomich doing ? "

" Gone to bed, sir. I was to say, if anyone asked to see him, that he intends to pray all night, sir."

" Oh ! very well. Go away now, my man. You see, Sergey, he is always with Thomas, so I am even afraid of him. The servants hate him, because he tells Thomas everything they say or do. However, he's gone now, so come on, old boy, we'll have a thorough good chat. I was quite afraid you were seriously angry, and would go away. You mustn't go, Sergey ; I have no one but you, you know ; you and Korofskin. Well, thank God ! now I can talk to you. I've arranged everything."

" Excuse me a moment, uncle. What have you arranged, and of what possible use can my presence here be now ? I confess my head simply whirls in this extraordinary place."

" Mine is not very steady either, it has been whirling for the

last half year, my good fellow. Well, I've arranged *everything*. Firstly, I am forgiven, absolutely forgiven, of course under certain conditions, but I am not at all anxious about them. Sasha is forgiven too. I say, didn't Sasha fly out at tea? Dear little Sasha. I'm proud of that girl, Sergey; she's a little impulsive, but her heart is pure gold, sir. God bless her! You are forgiven, too, under conditions. You may go anywhere you like, and mix with anyone you please, but you are not to speak a word in the presence of either mother or Thomas. I promised this in your name, that you would hold your tongue, and listen to what your elders—I mean to what others—said. Don't be angry, Sergey. Of course, you are young still, and Mrs. Obno skin says that—”

Of course I was young, and proved the fact immediately by flying into a rage.

“Listen, uncle,” I cried, almost breathless, “Just tell me one thing and relieve my mind —am I in a lunatic asylum—or am I not?”

“Oh Sergey, Sergey!” said the colonel, “what an impatient fellow you are,—dear no, no! it's not a lunatic asylum a bit, but simply there has been a little temper shown on both sides; you must admit, my dear boy, that you *did* behave rather badly—think how you pitched into him—a man of mature age, too, you should respect his years.”

“Such people don't deserve even the respect due to age!” I cried

“No, no, my dear boy, that's too strong, that's too much. I don't mind fair criticism, but really—Sergey—you have quite surprised me, painfully surprised me.”

“Don't be angry, uncle—I am wrong to speak so to you, to your mind; as for your Thomas Tomish, I—”

“There you are again, ‘your Thomas Tomich?’ don't judge him hardly, Sergey, there's a good fellow. Think of him as a soured man, a misanthrope, but he is a noble-hearted fellow—the noblest of mankind. Well, you heard yourself, it was really angelic; all these little paroxysms of temper, they are nothing at all—you mustn't think of them.”

“Very well, very well, uncle, let's drop the subject; tell me, have you seen Nastia?”

“Oh my dear fellow, the whole town has been about her. Look here, Sergey; in the first place we have all agreed to congratulate Thomas, to-morrow, upon his birthday—it is his birth-

day, you know ; little Sásha is a good child, but she was quite wrong in what she said ; so we are all going there early in a body, and Iljusha is going to recite some verses, and—oh ! if you would only come and congratulate him, too, I believe he would forgive you all, dear boy ; do forgive any offence he may have given you, and come—and after all you *did* give it him pretty hot, worthy man, and—”

“ Uncle, uncle ! ” I shouted, losing all patience. “ I came to talk sense with you and here you are again wandering off into this nonsense about Thomas. Do you know, I ask once more—are you aware of what is going on about Nastia ? ”

“ Of course I do—of course ; don’t shout at me so, my good fellow. Why the whole of this fuss is about her and has been for an age. I haven’t told you so before because I did not want to frighten you ; but they are doing their best to drive her out of the house, in fact they insist upon my discharging her ; imagine my position. But thank God it’s all settled now. You see they all thought that I loved her and wished to marry her—that I was intent upon ruining myself, in fact—for they have proved to me conclusively that such a step *would* be ruin, and therefore, to save me, they determined to drive her out. All this was mamma’s doing, not Thomas’s. Well, I’ve soothed their minds for them, by telling them that you are Nastia’s future husband and that you have come down on purpose to make the necessary arrangements. So now she is to stay, at all events for a while—until they see how things go. I can tell you you went up a peg or two in the general estimation when I said you were to marry Nastia ; it calmed mother wonderfully.”

“ Oh uncle ! ” I cried, “ what a hopeless muddle you have got things into ! you don’t seem to be aware that Nastia is off to-morrow, and that her father came to-day on purpose to take her away ; and that this is definitely arranged and that she told me so herself this very evening ? Do you know this, or do you not ? ”

Poor uncle stood before me with his mouth open, speechless and motionless. I think I saw him shiver and heard him give a deep sigh.

Without wasting a moment, I told him all about my talk with Nastia, my proposal and her refusal ; her anger with uncle because he had dared to send for me ; her intention to save him from the marriage with Tatiana Ivanovna, by going away her-

self—in fact, the whole history, disguising nothing. I believe I rather exaggerated the more annoying portions of my tale in order to strike my uncle forcibly and compel him to take some serious step. I succeeded in impressing him considerably; he gave a cry, and hid his face in his hands.

"Where is she—do you know?" "Where is she now?" he asked, pale with fright. "And I came here—fool that I am! in a fool's paradise, believing that I had arranged the whole matter," he added in despairing accents.

"I don't know where she is now, but she ran off to see you and tell you all she had said to me—before everybody; I suppose, they would not let her in."

"I should think not; what a dreadful business it would have been—oh! the proud hot-tempered little thing she is! And where will she go to? And you're a nice sort of fellow letting her refuse you. Why didn't you make her like you, eh? answer! don't stand staring there."

"Good heavens, uncle! what a thing to ask! how am I to answer such questions as those?"

"And why not?—why not? my dear fellow, you *must* marry her. What do you suppose I brought you from town for? You *must* make her happy, otherwise they'll drive her away; but if you marry her she will be my dear niece, and she shall stay. Where could she go to—what could she do? be a governess?—nonsense! that's all nonsense—how is she to live until she gets a place? She won't take a farthing from me, nor will her father. She keeps the whole family—nine of them. Of course I could recommend her—but how can you trust people? Where am I to find a family that I could trust her into? All sorts of dreadful things might happen to her, she might be insulted by some scoundrel—no, no, my head whirls to think of it—oh God! oh God!"

"Uncle," I said with all the solemnity I could muster, "forgive me one question, and don't be angry with me; for on your answer a great deal may depend—I have a certain degree of *right* to ask you for an answer, uncle—"

"Well, what is it, what question?"

"Tell me now, frankly and truly, as before God, do you or do you not feel that you are more or less in love with Nastia yourself, and would like to marry her? Reflect—*that* is why she is being driven out of the place."

My uncle made a gesture of impatience.

"I? in love? why, you are all in one plot against me. What did I summon you for, but to show them all that they were on the wrong scent. Why should I have asked *you* to marry her then? I? in love with her? Nonsense."

"Allow me, uncle, allow me to say my word—I don't see anything but good in the suggestion, on the contrary, you would secure her happiness by loving her—and God grant you may so love her. God give you such a loving counsellor to be at your side and help you."

"But, my dear boy, how can you talk so? Why do you jump to your conclusions so hastily—I have frequently remarked that trait in you. Now isn't it downright unreasonable—your suggestion? How can I marry a girl whom I look upon as my daughter? Why, I should be ashamed to think of her in any other light. I, an old man, and she, a sweet rosebud. Thomas expressed it in those very words. My love for her is paternal, and you want to make out that it is conjugal. She might accept me out of gratitude perhaps, but she would despise me for it afterwards. I do love her with all my heart—I would give my soul for her—darling of my heart, I love her just like my own little Sásha, even more, I admit it. Sásha is my daughter; but Nastia is my daughter by adoption of love. My lost Katia used to love her; I educated her—did you notice her beautiful smile, Sergey? so coy and lovely; you think she is laughing at you, but she isn't a bit. I thought you would propose and be accepted, and that you would both have lived here with me, and I should have loved you so, loved you so! Oh, how happy we all should have been together, and I should never have left you again, never. Oh, *why* do all these people quarrel and rage with each other—why can't I set matters right somehow once for all? Oh dear! oh dear!"

"That's all very well, uncle—but she refused me"

"Refused, did she?" he repeated thoughtfully; "do you know, I had an idea that she might do that, but no, it can't be. You must have mismanaged it—you did it too suddenly, you offended her—perhaps you paid her some stupid compliments, or something of that sort? It can't be—Sergey, tell me all about it again, carefully, every word."

I did so; but when I came to repeat how Nastia had wished to save uncle from the marriage with Tatiana Ivanovna by withdrawing herself, he gave a bitter laugh.

"Save me until to-morrow," he cried,

"You don't mean to tell me, uncle, that you are going to marry Tatiana?" I cried, in great alarm.

"And how else do you suppose I bribed them to leave Nastia alone? to-morrow I am to make Tatiana a formal proposal."

"And you agreed to this?" *

"What was to be done, my dear fellow? I had to do it; it broke my heart, but I agreed to do it. To-morrow I make a proposal; and it's to be a very quiet wedding, quite a family affair; you are to be best man, so that they can't turn you out before the time. Oh dear! what's to be done? I can't help it—they tell me I must do it for my children's sake—and what would one not do for one's children? Besides, I daresay they are quite right, I can't sit still and do nothing for the family all my life."

"But, my dear uncle, she's *mad*," I cried, beside myself with sorrow and despair.

"No, no! she's not mad, oh dear no, she's been a little unfortunate, that's all. What's to be done, my dear fellow? I would gladly marry someone with more wits; but, well, she is a good, kind-hearted, generous woman, at all events, and, besides, I can't help it. They mean well by me, and I feel that sooner or later they are sure to make me marry her; so it was better to agree now than to have more rows about it, and then have to agree all the same later on. I tell you, Sergey, candidly, I am downright pleased in some measure; you see it's such a weight off one's shoulders to have decided definitely. I see the finger of fate in it; and then Nastia stays with us; at least, I made that stipulation; but now, you say, she wants to go of her own accord. Oh, curse it all, she sha'n't ~~go~~ look here, Sergey, just wait a moment or two here," uncle added with determination, "I shall be back directly."

"But where are you off to, uncle?"

"I may see her somewhere, I must. Sergey, it shall be all arranged, I give you my word, and you shall marry her, I insist upon it."

My uncle rushed out of the room but did not turn towards the main house; he went into the garden. I watched him out of the window,

XIL

I STAYED and waited all alone. What an intolerable position I was in, I thought; here was I refused by this girl, and my uncle still insisting upon my marrying her. The thoughts chased each other confusedly through my brain; the recollection of Misinchikoff and his suggestion, kept returning and rioting through it; uncle must be saved at any cost; had I not better go and look for Misinchikoff and tell him all about uncle's latest departure? But where had uncle gone to? he said he was going to look for Nastia, and he went into the garden; the idea of a secret rendezvous between them got into my head—it gave me an unpleasant impression; I remembered what Misinchikoff had said about an improper intimacy; however, I dismissed the idea of such a thing, the suspicion was an unworthy one; uncle could never practice deception, that was quite clear.

My agitation increased with every moment. I stepped out into the garden and, without thinking of it, went down the same path, into the dark distance of which my uncle had disappeared. The moon had risen now; and, besides, I knew the garden so well of old that I felt no fear of losing myself in it. When I came to the old summer-house, which stood on the brink of the pond, I suddenly heard voices inside.

I cannot express how painful a sense of dismay assailed me at this moment. I stood as though turned to stone. I felt sure that it was my uncle and Nastia.

I decided to continue my walk past the summer-house, soothing my feeling of shame with the reflection that I was walking with my usual footprint and was not attempting to eavesdrop or do anything underhand.

Suddenly there was the unmistakeable sound of a kiss, followed by a few animated words, and immediately following that again, a shrill woman's cry; a moment after a female form, clad in a white dress flitted past me like a shadow. I thought she covered her face with her hands in order to prevent recognition—no doubt I had been observed from the summer-house. But, what was my amazement when I recognised Omoskia rushing out of the summer-house after the startled

lady ! Obnoskin who, according to Misinchikoff, had left the place some hours ago.

Obnoskin, on his part, was considerably taken aback to see me ; his usual effrontery vanished at once.

" I beg your pardon," he blurted out, " I—I wasn't expecting to see you here."

" Nor I, you," I replied, " especially as I heard you had gone."

" Oh, no, I didn't go away, I merely escorted my mother a short way. But, may I come down on you for a piece of great generosity ? Will you be the best fellow in the world ? "

" How ? "

" There are occasions when one honest man is obliged to have recourse to another honest man in order to have his, so to speak, finest feelings recognised ; you follow me, of course ? "

" I'm afraid I don't in the least."

" Did you observe the lady who was in the summer-house with me ? "

" Yes, I saw her, but did not recognise her."

" Oh, you didn't recognise her ! Well, that lady I shall very soon be able to call my wife."

" I congratulate you, I'm sure. But what can I do for you ? "

" Well, one thing at least ; preserve the strictest secrecy as to your having discovered myself and a lady in this place."

" Who could it have been ? " I thought, " surely not—I beg your pardon," I added to Obnoskin ; " but I think you must excuse me giving you my word to that."

" Oh, but do, for goodness sake, think of my position," he entreated ; " it's a secret. Some day you too may be engaged to a girl, and then I—"

" Hush ! who's that coming ? "

" Where ? " Undoubtedly, about thirty yards off there was the shadowy form of a man approaching us.

" It's Thomas Tomich, I'm sure," said Obnoskin, trembling in every limb. " I knew him by his footstep. Good heavens ! and there are steps coming from the other side too. Listen ! Well, good-bye, thanks very much—and—do, please, be mum." Obnoskin disappeared.

A minute later my uncle stood before me as though he had risen up out of the earth.

" Is that you ? " he said. " All is lost, Sergey, all is lost ! "

I observed that he, too, trembled from head to foot.

" What is lost, uncle ? "

"Come along," he said, and seizing me by the arm he dragged me after him; he was panting and greatly excited. All the way to the house he never said a word, and did not allow me to speak either. When we arrived in my room my uncle was as white as a corpse, and the first thing that he did was to faint. I sprinkled him with water. Something terrible must have happened, I thought, for such a man as my uncle to be affected in this way.

"Uncle, uncle, what is it?" I cried, at last. *

"All is lost, Sergey. Thomas Tomich caught me in the garden with Nastia, and exactly at the moment when I was kissing her."

"Kissing her in the garden?" I cried, staring at the colonel in amazement.

"Yes, my dear boy, in the garden I went to find her if I could, and to talk her over and reason with her, about *yourself*, you know. And I found she had been waiting a whole hour for me at that little broken garden seat behind the pond. She often meets me there when she has anything to talk about."

"Often, uncle?"

"Yes, nearly every night of late; but I think we must have been watched, especially by Miss Petreplitsin; so for the last four or five days we have avoided these meetings; however, to-day she required to see me about something or other. You know yourself there was need enough for us to meet to-night. Well, I went to the old rendezvous in half hope to find her there, and—she had been waiting an hour for me. She wanted to speak to me."

"Good heavens, uncle! What dreadful rashness. Why, didn't you know that you were watched?"

"Yes, of course; but it was a critical moment, Sergey, and it was absolutely necessary that we should exchange views. You see we dare not look at one another in the day time; when she's in one corner of the room I take care to stare into the other, and pretend to be unaware of her existence, but in the evening we come together to have a chat."

"Well, go on, uncle!"

"I hadn't time to say much to her, my heart beat so fast and I could not help my eyes filling with tears. Well, I began to talk ~~about~~ ^{over} marrying yourself, and she said, 'You do not love me at all, I suppose? You evidently do not see,' and with that she suddenly flung herself on my neck, put both her

arms round me, and sobbed and cried, 'I only love you,' she said, 'and I will not marry anybody else. I have loved you for a long while, but I cannot marry you. To-morrow I shall leave this place, and I shall go to a convent.'

"Good God! did she really say that? Well, go on, uncle. What happened next?"

"I looked up, and there was Thomas before us. Where had he come from? He surely could not have been hiding among the shrubs in order to be a witness to our interview?"

"Scoundrel!"

"Well, I remained rooted to the spot, Nastia ran off, and Thomas stalked past me, but he looked back and threatened me with his finger. Oh, Sergey, think what a row there'll be to-morrow!"

"Of course. I quite realise that!"

"But do you realise," he cried in despair, "do you realise that these people are trying to ruin, shame, and dishonour her? They are only looking for some plausible opportunity of fastening dishonour upon her in order that they may turn her out of the house. Well, and here is their opportunity. They have already spread a rumour of too intimate relations between herself and me. The blackguards have gone so far as to state that she has had love passages with Vidopliassoff. It's all the Pereplitsin, you know, who spreads these things. What's to become of us now? What will happen to-morrow? Surely Thomas won't publish it?"

"He most assuredly *will*, uncle!"

"If he does—if he dares to repeat a word of what he saw," said the colonel, biting his lips and closing his fists—"but no; I don't believe it. He won't do it. He's too generous a fellow for that; he will be merciful to her."

"Merciful, or unmerciful," I said with decision, "one thing is very certain, you must make Nastia a proposal of marriage to-morrow."

Uncle looked at me but did not move or speak.

"You must understand, my dear uncle, that if this story were to get about, the girl's reputation would be compromised. Do you realise that you must anticipate such a calamity as quickly as possible, so that you may look the world in the face bravely and proudly? You must propose to her at once; not upon all their arguments and humbug; and if Thomas dares to put in his word against her, *you must stand him in the dock*."

" My dear fellow," cried my uncle, " I was thinking of that very thing as I came along here just now ! "

" And what did you decide upon ? "

" Exactly as you say. I had made up my mind before I began to speak to you."

" Well done, uncle, three cheers ! " and I fell on his neck and hugged him. We spoke long and seriously. I put before him every conceivable argument for his marrying Nastia—all of which I am quite sure he well understood without my assistance. I was happy and radiant. How easily *duty*—the sense of duty—led my good uncle to action ; but for this sense nothing would have made him move. However, I still could not see my way out of the dilemma we had got ourselves into ; how would it all end ? I felt quite confident that uncle would never leave undone what he had once made up his mind was his absolute duty ; but would be have strength to go through with his projected task in spite of all opposition from the home tyrants ? At all events I would do my best (and began at once) to support and encourage him with all the youthful ardour and zeal I could bring to bear upon him. " Well," I said, " thank God that all is settled and your last doubt vanished ! You see a thing has happened which you did not at all expect, but which every body else foresaw as a probability and observed as a fact ; I mean that Nastia has fallen in love with you. In the face of this truth you could surely never so act that her pure love would return disgraced to her bosom, to be a lasting reproach and shame both to her and to yourself ? "

" Never, never, my dear fellow, certainly not ! But is it really possible that I am to be so truly happy at last ? " cried my good old uncle, throwing himself on my neck. " Why is it that she loves me—how has it come about ? What have I done ? I'm sure there's nothing about me that a girl would fall in love with. Why, I'm an old man compared to her. I never should have believed it—darling, angel of light that she is ! I say, Sergey, you asked me just now whether I was in love with her ; had you any idea about it ? "

" Well, I merely saw, my dear uncle, that you were about as much in love as a man can be—that's all. You loved, and knew nothing of your own feelings. Good heavens ! to think of your sending me to marry her, solely in order to have her for your own niece, and that she might be near you at all times."

"And you, Sergey, can you forgive me, old fellow?"

"Oh dear yes, uncle!"

The good old man embraced me again."

"But you must take care, uncle," I continued, "for everyone will be against you. You will have to stand up and defy the whole lot of them—mind, and that not later than to-morrow."

"Yes, yes, to-morrow," he replied, thoughtfully. "We'll seize the nettle boldly and manfully, with generosity but at the same time with sturdiness—yes, that's the word—with sturdiness."

"Don't funk out of it, uncle, you know."

"No, no! I sha'n't be afraid. Only—I don't quite know how to begin."

"Oh, don't think of that now—sufficient for the day. To-morrow will be time enough—just be as calm as you can and take things as they come, and, mind, if Thomas says a word kick him out of the house, at once, and pulverize him."

"Oh, can't we manage without turning him off, Sergey? Look here, this is what I intend to do; I shall go to him early to-morrow morning and just tell him everything as I have told you now; he *must* understand me—he *must*, he can't help it, for he's a generous-hearted fellow, Sergey, a noble-minded man, indeed he is. But I'll tell you what does bother me a good deal, and that is, that mother may have taken it into her head to tell Tatiana that I was going to propose to her to-morrow; it would be so dreadfully awkward."

"Oh, don't bother yourself about Tatiana, uncle," I said. I thought it better at this point to tell him about the scene at the summer-house with Obnoskin. Uncle was immensely surprised. I did not say a word about Misinchikoff's designs.

"Extraordinary woman!" he cried, "a really *most* extraordinary woman! poor thing! they all buzz around her and hope to profit by her simplicity. Surely it wasn't Obnoskin? why, he drove away! I am very much surprised, Sergey—it is a most unexpected departure this! But are you quite sure—was it Tatiana Ivanovna?"

I told him that I did not see her face, but that from certain characteristics I was convinced that the woman I saw was Tatiana.

"Hum! wasn't it some little affair with one of the servants, and you thought you recognised Tatiana? Wasn't it Dasha,

now, the gardener's daughter? she's an insinuating sort of girl—and she has been observed, certainly—but no! he said he was going to marry her, didn't he? so *that* won't do! Strange! it really is most strange!"

At last we separated. I embraced my uncle.

"To-morrow," he said, "to-morrow all will be 'settled'; before you are out of bed the whole thing will be cut and dried. I shall go to Thomas early and set the whole thing before him boldly. I shall tell him everything as I would to my own brother—good-night, Sergey; get to bed, you look so tired. I sha'n't sleep a wink all night."

He disappeared. I lay down at once for I was as tired as a log, ~~it~~ had been a hard day for me. I had some difficulty in getting to sleep, however, for I had so much to think about. But strange as were the varied impressions elbowing each other through my brain just before I fell asleep, there was yet a more striking impression awaiting me for the moment of waking

PART II.

CHAPTER I.

I SLEPT very soundly, and had no dreams. Suddenly, I was aware of a twenty-stone weight on my feet. I gave a cry and woke up. It was daylight, and the sun shone brightly in at the window. On my bed—or more correctly, on my feet—sat Mr. Bachchéef. There was no doubt of it; this was certainly he. Extracting my legs as best I could from under his vast person, I sat up in bed and stared at him with the stupid incredulousness of a half-wakened man.

“And he must needs lose time staring at me,” cried the ponderous gentleman. “Don’t stars like that; get up—quick. I’ve been trying to wake you for the last half-hour. Come, rub your eyes and wake up properly.”

“What’s the matter? What time is it?”

“It’s early still, my good fellow; but she hasn’t waited for the daylight. Get up, quick. We are off—full chase.”

“Who? What?”

“Why, our amiable lunatic, she’s eloped. She went off before daylight, and here am I wasting the precious hours trying to get you awake. Get up, my friend, even your uncle is waiting for you.”

“Whom, and what are you talking about?” I asked with some impatience, half guessing the truth all the same; “not Tatiana Ivanovna surely?”

“Yes, of course I am. Who else? I hinted to them that this would happen, and they wouldn’t listen—and, here’s a jolly name’s-day present for the establishment! Her estate is on the ‘Amur,’ and so *as you run* in her head. And a nice sort of fellow he is too—the man with the wretched little beard.”

“What, Misinehikoff, do you mean?”

“Nonsense, Misinehikoff! It ~~is~~ ~~is~~ ~~is~~ that fool glass of sherry at supper last night has something to do with your present condition, young man. It’s Obooskin, my friend, not

Misinchikoff. "Why, Misinchikoff is a capital good fellow; he's coming with us on the scene."

"What?" I said, jumping up, "do you mean to say it's Obnoskin?"

"Good Heavens! what a man you are! you take an hour to bring to your senses, and then you won't believe what a fellow says to you. Come, you'd better get up and put your things on, instead of jabbering here, unless you wish to be left behind. We've wasted time enough over you already, and time is gold just now," and the good man left the room in a state of considerable irritation.

Amazed with the news, I dressed as fast as I could and rushed downstairs, thinking to find my uncle over at the house; but the family were all asleep still, and knew nothing of the occurrence. I came across Nastia at the front door. She was hastily got up in a sort of morning dressing gown. Her hair was not arranged for the day. It was clear that she had just jumped out of bed, and was waiting for some one at the threshold. "Tell me, is it true that Tatiana Ivanovna has eloped with Mr. Obnoskin?" she inquired. She was pale and frightened, and spoke in a broken voice.

"So they say! I am looking for uncle. We are off in pursuit."

"Oh, bring her back, bring her back, quickly! she is lost if you do not bring her."

"But where is uncle?"

"Probably at the stables, where the carriage is being got ready. I was waiting for him here. Listen; I want you to tell him from me that I wish to leave to-day; I have quite made up my mind. My father will take me, and we can start very soon. All is lost now; it's all over," So saying, he gazed wildly at me and suddenly burst into tears—it looked very like hysterics.

"Oh, do calm yourself, do be calm! I assure you all this is for the best; you will see it is. Nastia, Nastia! what is the matter?"

"I don't know," she said. "I don't know what's the matter with me," she sighed deeply, and pressed my hands tightly. "Tell him—tell him—"

At that instant there was a noise outside, and she left me in a panic, and hurried upstairs without finishing her sentence.

I found my companions, that is, uncle, Bachcheef, and Misinchikoff, in the courtyard at the stables. Fresh horses had

been put to Bachchéef's carriage ; everything was ready for a start ; they were only waiting for me.

"There he is !" shouted my uncle when I made my appearance. "Have you heard ?" he added, looking at me with a very strange expression of face. Alarm, bewilderment, and at the same time a sort of hope were struggling for the mastery in look, voice and movement. He was evidently conscious that this was a turning point in his destiny.

I was made aware of all the details at once. Bachchéef had set out from his house at earliest dawn in order to be in time for early service at the monastery—which was some three miles from his place. Just at the turn into the high road he observed a tarantass whirling along at full speed with Tatiana and Obnoskin inside it. Tatiana, evidently frightened and crying violently, called out and stretched her hands towards Bachchéef, as though entreating help, as the vehicle disappeared.

"And as for the scoundrel himself," Bachchéef continued, "there he sat, neither dead nor alive, and trying to hide himself. But I was not quite so green as all that."

Bachchéef had not wasted a moment ; he turned his horses' heads our way and came to Stepánchikoff. Arrived there he had awakened uncle and Misinchikoff, and last of all, myself. We decided to start off immediately.

"Fancy—Obnoskin, eh ? Obnoskin !" cried my uncle to me. "Who would ever have thought it ?"

"Nothing is surprising from such a blackguard as Obnoskin," said Misinchikoff with the wildest sudden access of rage ; but he no sooner caught my eye than he turned aside.

"Now then, are we going to stand here jabbering all day ?" asked our fat friend, climbing into the carriage.

"Yes, come along, come along !" cried uncle.

"It's all for the best, this, uncle," I whispered : "do you see how nicely it all fits in ?"

"Ah, hush ! hush ! that's not right of you ! besides, my dear fellow, they'll be driving ~~her~~ away now for a certainty, out of spite, because their plan has failed. It will be a dreadful business so far as I can see."

"Well, are we going, or shall we order some victuals, and have a nip of vodka ?" asked Bachchéef sarcastically. We all jumped in at once and drove off.

At first we all sat silent. Uncle gave me looks of intelligence, but did not like talking to me before everybody. Every

now and then he would relapse into a reverie, then suddenly rouse himself once more, shiver, and look around him. Misinchikoff wore his usual calm demeanour; he smoked his cigar, and put on the air of a man suffering for righteousness' sake. However, Bachchéef was noisy enough for the whole party; he growled, and frowned, and raged, and grew crimson in the face, over and over again, and nothing would pacify him.

"Are you sure they have gone to Mischno?" asked my uncle at last. "It's a little village fifteen miles off," he explained to me, "and belongs to a retired government clerk who is a very bad character, so I am told—well, and he is supposed to be helping Obnoskin in this business."

"Of course he is," cried Bachchéef; "but probably they've got away from there by now, while we wasted three hours dawdling about the place."

"Don't be alarmed," said Misinchikoff, "we shall catch them all right."

"Catch them! Yes, of course, they'll *wait* for us, won't they?"

"We shall catch them, they won't have had time to take any steps yet," said uncle.

"Take any steps! She stepped away very neatly, did your innocent and harmless little friend," shouted Bachchéef.

"But, look here, she's over age," I cried. "We can't bring her back if she doesn't want to come."

"Yes, but she *will* come back, you needn't be afraid of that," said uncle; "this means nothing with her. No sooner shall we appear on the scene than she will want to come back at once. We can't leave her, my good fellow, like this—a sort of sacrifice to the irony of fate—it's our duty as it were, to—"

"Over age!—of course she is—but she's a fool, a downright fool! Why, I went into her room accidentally the other night, and there she was dancing the schattische before the glass with her hands on her sides—dressed up for it, too—tsu! I saw how it would end!"

"But why blame the poor thing?" I said, rather timidly, "she is, well, not in the most robust intellectual health. It seems to me Obnoskin is the one to blame."

"Doubtless intellectual health, what nonsense. She's simply a fool, a *fool*. As for Obnoskin, what's the good of talking about him? We all know what he is. He'll get hold of the money, and then he'll laugh at her."

"You really don't think that he'll throw her over at once, do you?"

"Of course he will! Do you suppose he'll drag his new found treasure about with him? Why should he? He'll get the money out of her and then leave her somewhere—anywhere—under a hedge at the roadside to smell the pretty flowers, and off he'll trot. But it's no affair of mine. What a fool I was to come."

I confess I did not listen much to Banchieff's excited utterances. I was thinking about Tatiana Ivanovna. I will give a very short sketch of her life, here, in order to throw light upon this crisis in her career.

First, as a poor little orphan child, living on the kindness of strangers; then as a poor girl, then as a young woman, then as a mature woman—Tatiana Ivanovna's cup of sorrow had been overfull all her life. She was of a merry disposition from her birth up, and had been able to retain some portion of her natural gaiety through all the trials of her not too joyous youth. But little by little Tatiana grew thin, and pale, and thoughtful, and given to hysterics and sudden fits of sobbing. And the more hopeless became her actual chance of married happiness, the wilder and more excited were the ideas and visions which haunted her imagination. Noblemen, and courtiers at her feet, riches, and beauty, and—~~not~~ dying for love of her, and lastly he, the ideal he—the combination of all virtues and perfections, a passionate, loves, artist, poet, of exalted rank—her own ideal lover was present not only in the visions of night, but in the dreams of day, unceasingly! Her reason began to totter under the strain of such continuous indulgence of a vivid imagination, and at last Destiny played her a final trick. When at the very lowest point of humiliation, as companion to a wretched, toothless old woman, who growled at every bit of bread Tatiana ate, and over much of clothing that she wore—when, in a moment of desperation, she suddenly learned that the man she had always loved, her immediate heir had all died out before her, Tatiana, whom it had never struck to murmur, and complain of wealth, unexpectedly and never so much as it were from the sky, and thoughtless, and unfeeling Tatiana. She was the legal heiress! This news was enough to drive her off completely. The poor thing had never had the advantage of common sense.

Intoxicated with joy, she now let herself into the whirl-

pool of those day-dreams and phantasies in which she had but bathed before. Her dreams had received a half fulfilment—why should not *he* turn up too? She did not argue it thus, but she believed that *he* would appear. And while awaiting *him*—the ideal—crowds of cavaliers, and knights, and officers, and poets, and nobles from all parts of the world, with beards and without, Spaniards and not Spaniards (but she liked Spaniards best) were ever about her; and never left her, paying their homage and dying for love at her feet. She was but a step from the lunatic asylum now! *

Incidents in her actual life became merely items of the life of her imagination; if she looked at a man he fell in love with her; if anyone happened to pass her, he was a Spaniard; did any one die, it was for love of her! The fact that men like Obnoskin really did now begin to court her acted, of course, as confirmation of her hallucinations; besides Obnoskin there were Misinchikoff and a dozen others. Poor Tatiana never even suspected that these men were after her money. She was convinced that at the beck of some unseen power all men and women had of a sudden thrown aside the evil and put on the good—that they all had become kind and affectionate and joyful. *He* had not as yet turned up, but there was no doubt that *he* could come, and meanwhile life was not at all bad, and was *somewhat* of pleasures and kind people that she could well wait. So Tatiana waited, ate bonbons and read novels; these latter, however, only heated her imagination, and were generally thrown away at the second page or so, for the first few lines were quite enough to set her own lively imagination working, though, likely enough, they were nothing more than descriptions of places or persons, or even of somebody's dress. She was continually ordering new hats, gowns, lace, ribbons, flowers, bonbons, and little dogs, and spent most of the night trying on her finery before the looking-glass. Soon after her inheritance, Tatiana was discovered to be a relation of the family; but I am perfectly certain that Mis. General invented the relationship simply for the sake of getting, as it were, possession of Tatiana, with the firm intention of marrying her to my uncle for the sake of her money.

It was nearly ten o'clock when we reached the village of Misinchikoff, a wretched little place some three miles off the high road, built in a hollow. Six or seven peasants' huts, black with smoke, crooked, and badly thatched with dirty straw,

seemed to stare uncomfortably and disconsolately at the approaching guests ; there was not a scrap of garden or any green thing within a quarter of a mile. Poor Tatiana could not have been very romantically impressed by the first sight of her new home. The manor house consisted of a long log hut with six windows all in a row, and hastily and badly thatched with straw ; the yard had no railing of any kind round it, and in a corner of this yard stood Obnoskin's tarantass.

We came down on the guilty couple as quietly as snow falls on the head, and when we drove up to the house we heard cries and wailing proceeding from an open window.

The first person we met was a barefooted boy, who ran away from us the moment he caught sight of us.

In the first room, upon a long Turkish divan covered with some kind of cotton stuff, sat Tatiana Ivanovna, in tears. Seeing us, she gave a scream and covered her face with her hands. Alongside of her, stood Obnoskin, frightened and bewildered to a terrible extent ; so much so, that he came hurriedly forward to press our hands, as though he was delighted to see us. Through the open door, leading into the room next to this, one could just catch a glimpse of a woman's dress ; somebody was evidently listening and looking through some aperture invisible to ourselves. There ~~did~~ not seem to be any people belonging to the house ; they were all hidden away, probably.

"There she is—the traveller !" cried Bachchœf. "Covering her face with her hands, too."

"Moderate your transports, sir. Such manners are by no means seemly. No one but the colonel has a right to speak at this moment, we are all mere outsiders," said Misinchikoff, cuttingly.

My uncle darted a severe look at Bachchœf, and, as though he did not remark Obnoskin who had advanced towards him with outstretched hand, stepped forward straight to Tatiana Ivanovna, who still sat covering her face with her hands, and in the gentlest tones he could assume and with sincere sympathy written in every line of his face, said to her :

"Tatiana Ivanovna, we all love you so well and esteem you so highly that we have come ourselves to inquire as to your intentions. Would you like to drive back to Stepanchikoff with us ? It is Illusha's name-day, to-day. Mother is waiting most impatiently for you, and Sashka and Nastia have been crying for you all the morning ! "

Tatiana timidly raised her head and looked at him through her fingers; then, suddenly bursting into tears, she rose and threw herself on his shoulder.

"Oh, take me away from here, take me away—away—quick! take me as quickly as you can!"

"Hm! she's had enough of it already," whispered Bachchœuf, pinching my arm.

"Then, the matter is at an end," said my uncle drily to Obnoskin, and hardly looking at him. "Tatiana Ivanovna, will you take my arm? shall we go?"

A flutter was audible behind the door at this moment, and the door seemed to open a little wider.

"Allow me—if we look at the question from another point of view," said Obnoskin, who was much confused, and kept looking at the half-opened door, "this action of yours, colonel, in my house, is—and, besides, here am I bowing to you, and I declare you do not even return my bow."

"Excuse me," returned my uncle. "Your action in my house was a very shabby action, indeed, besides which, this house is not yours. You have heard Tatiana Ivanovna does not wish to stay here another minute. What else do you desire?—now—not a word, please. I beg you, particularly, to avoid all further discussion—you will find that course by far the most profitable for yourself." Uncle looked very severely at Obnoskin.

But the latter had sunk into such an unenviable state of confusion of mind that he now began to talk the most unexpected and inconceivable twaddle.

"Do not despise me, colonel," he said, almost crying with shame and mortification—and continuing to glance at the half-open door; he spoke in a half-whisper and seemed anxious that someone in the next room should not hear him. "It was all my mother's doing, not mine. I did not do it out of selfishly interested motives, colonel; I did it generously, you know. Of course, I *had* interested motives, too, colonel, but I assure you I did it with a noble aim, colonel; for I should spend the money well, I should help the poor; and then I wanted to push on the movement for the general enlightenment of the country and for founding a scholarship at the university. That's the sum I was going to give to my new wealth, colonel, and no, not—don't you know—not for any bad purpose."

Everyone of us felt sincerely ashamed and confused; even Misinchikoff blushed red and turned away; as for poor uncle,

he was so shocked and uncomfortable that he didn't know what to say.

"Well, that is quite enough," he said, at last. "Don't say any more—it's all right, of course; anyone might have done the same thing. Come back, if you like, my dear fellow; come to dinner—I shall be glad to see you."

But Bachchéef was not quite so soft.

"Found a scholarship!" he cried, with scorn. "A fellow like that founding a scholarship. Bosh! you arrant humbug, you; it was your tender heart that led you to do it, I suppose—was it? And where's your mother—hidden somewhere, eh? I'll eat my head if she isn't somewhere about here, behind the screen or under the bed, or somewhere."

"Stephen, Stephen!" cried my uncle.

Obnoskin flushed up and was about to make some reply or protestation, but before he could open his mouth the door opened and his mother, in *propria persona*, agitated to a degree, and with her eyes glaring like burning coal, rushed into the room. She was crimson with rage.

"What's all this? what's going on here?" she cried. "What do you mean, colonel, by coming dashing into a respectable house like this, with your bodyguard of rag-a-muffins, frightening ladies, and giving your orders as though you were master here. What does it mean, sir? I am not mad yet, thank heaven! colonel. And you, you idiot!" she here addressed her son, "what are you making a fool of yourself before these people for? Your mother is insulted in her own house and before your very nose, and you stand still with your mouth open. A nice sort of a young man *you* are, sir. You are a rag, sir, not a man at all; that's what it is!"

Where were the gentleness, the fashionable manners, where was the correct little eye-glass of yesterday? Madame Obnoskin was transformed; she now appeared as a fury, an unmasked fury!

My uncle hardly even looked at her. He took Tatiana on his arm hurriedly, and was about to leave the room; but Mrs. Obnoskin barred the way.

"No, no, sir; you do *not* leave this house so," she yelled. "By what right are you carrying Tatiana Ivánovna away by force? Are you annoyed that she did not fall into the abominable nets spread by you and your mamma and that fool Thomas Tomich? You would like to marry her yourself to

gratify your detestable self-interest ! Excuse me, but we have nobler ideas of right and wrong here. Tatiana Ivanovna, being aware of the yile plots against her at your house, herself entrusted her person to my son Paul, here. She herself begged him to save her, go to speak, from your villainous nets; and she was obliged to escape, sir—yes, escape—from your house, by night. Oh yes, she was ! That's what you drove her to, at length; isn't it so, Tatiana Ivanovna ? And this being the case, kindly explain how it is that you have dared to come—you and your gang, here—bursting into a respectable house and dragging away a noble lady by force, regardless of her cries and tears ! I will not allow it, sir ; I will not allow it. I am not mad ! Tatiana Ivanovna shall remain here, because it is her wish to do so. Come along, Tatiana Ivanovna, it's no use listening to these people ; they are your enemies, not your friends. Come along, don't be afraid ; I'll turn them all out in no time."

"No, no," cried the terrified Tatiana ; "I don't want to. I won't. What sort of a husband would he be for me ? I don't want to marry your son. He won't do for my husband."

"You don't wish to marry him !" shrieked Mrs. Obnoskin, panting with rage ; "you don't wish to ! You've come here with him and don't wish to marry him ? In that case, how dared you deceive us ? In that case, how dared you give him your promise and elope with him, and put us to all sorts of inconvenience and expense ? Very likely my son has thrown up a magnificent marriage for your sake. Perhaps he has lost tens of thousands of roubles of marriage portion through your behaviour. No, no ; you shall pay for this - you are bound to pay. We have proofs. You eloped at night time with him."

But we did not hear her out ; for, forming ourselves in a group around my uncle, with one accord we moved forward in a body, marching straight upon Mrs. Obnoskin, and so passed out into the open air. The carriage was ready.

"It is only dishonourable people and scoundrels who act in this way," shouted Mrs. Obnoskin from the threshold. "I shall hand in a complaint—you shall pay handsomely for this. You are going to a shameful house, Tatiana Ivanovna. You can't possibly marry the colonel, you know, for he is living in shameless intimacy with the governess, under your very nose."

My uncle trembled and grew very pale, biting his lip hard to keep his temper down ; he stepped forward to assist Tatiana

into the carriage. I went over to the other side of the vehicle, and was awaiting my turn to get in, when Obnoskin suddenly turned up alongside of me and seized my hand.

"At all events, allow me to solicit your friendship," he said, pressing my hand warmly, with a sort of despairing expression upon his face.

"How, friendship?" I asked, with one foot on the step of the carriage.

"Oh, I saw yesterday, plainly enough, that you were a very superior person; don't judge me harshly; I have simply been the tool of my mother, and have had no direct part in this matter. I assure you I have far more taste for literature than for this sort of thing; it was all mother—"

"Very well, very well; good-bye," I said.

We were all seated. The horses moved on and away we drove, Mrs. Obnoskin's cries and curses being audible for a long way down the road; while from every window of the house we had just left heads of various unknown persons popped out and stared after us with the greatest curiosity.

There were five of us in the carriage now; but Misinchikoff drove on the box. Bachchéef sat opposite to Tatiana Ivanovna. The latter was evidently delighted that we had taken her away, but was still crying. Uncle consoled her as best he could. He was very low-spirited himself, and it was clear that Mrs. Obnoskin's detestable insinuations about Nastia had hit him very hard.

However, the return journey would have been accomplished without the slightest jar, had not Bachchéef been with us.

Seated opposite Tatiana Ivanovna, he immediately began to behave in a most extraordinary fashion. He could not sit quiet; he jumped about in his place, and blushed and grunted and twisted; he grew especially excited when uncle tried to console Tatiana, and appeared to be absolutely beside himself, growling like a bulldog being teased by somebody. At last Tatiana herself, noticing that the fat person opposite her was in a very extraordinary frame of mind, stared intently at him; she then glanced at us and smiled, and, suddenly seizing her umbrella, gently tapped Mr. Bachchéef on the shoulder with it.

"Silly man," she said, with the most charming playfulness of manner, and hid behind her fan.

This sally was the last drop which made the cup to overflow.

"What?" yelled the old fellow. "What did you say, madame? So you are setting your cap at *me* now, are you?"

"Silly man, silly man!" cried poor Tatiana; and she burst out laughing and clapped her hands with glee.

"Stop!" called Bachchéef to the coachman; "stop."

The carriage stopped.

Bachchéef hurriedly opened the door and began climbing out.

"What are you doing, Stephen? Where are you going to?" cried uncle, in amazement.

"No, no. I've had enough of it," said the old fellow, trembling with rage. "I'm a little too old for that sort of thing, madame; I don't care about your *amour* games, they're not in my line; I think I'd rather die out here on the high road, madame, if it's all the same to you. Good-bye, madame—*comment vous portez vous?*"

And, sure enough, he got out and walked; and the carriage had to go alongside at foot's pace.

"Stephen, don't be a fool," cried uncle at last, irritably; "get in. We ought to be at home by now."

"No, thank you," he panted, dreadfully out of breath with his unaccustomed exercise.

"Drive on as hard as you can," said Misinchikoff to the driver.

"No, no. What are you doing?" cried uncle; but the carriage was tearing along fast now, and was some distance ahead of Bachchéef. Misinchikoff's plan was very successful.

"Stop, stop, you villain! stop, you cursed villain!" came a despairing voice from far behind.

The fat old fellow came panting up at last, with the perspiration pouring down his face, taking off his necktie and collar as he went. Silently and gloomily he climbed into the carriage, and I gave him my place, so that he was not obliged to sit opposite to Tatiana any more; who, for the whole of the rest of the drive, could not look at him without bursting out into loud laughter and clapping her hands delightedly. He, for his part, never said another word to anyone, and was much interested in the rolling of the off back wheel of the carriage.

It was mid-day when we reached Stepánchikoff. I went straight away to my room in the wing, where Gavril soon brought me some tea. I was just going to put him through a

course of questions, when suddenly my uncle entered and sent Gavril out again.

CHAPTER II.

"I'VE just come in for a minute," he said hurriedly; "I wished to tell you—I've just heard that ~~none~~ of them went to service this morning except Iliusha, Sásha, and Nastia. Mother was fainting, they say, and they had great difficulty in restoring her. They are all to meet in Thomas's apartments now, and they have sent for me to go too. I don't know whether to congratulate Thomas or not for his birthday—it's a serious question. And how will they take all this business? it's rather nasty, Sergey; I have a presentiment that—"

"On the contrary, uncle," I hastened to interrupt him, "everything is arranging itself providentially for you. Why, now you couldn't marry Tatiana Ivanovna any how, you know; think of the value of that one fact. I was anxious to point that out to you all the way home."

"Yes, yes, my dear boy; I know—but still—that's not all; I quite see the finger of Providence in all this, as you say; but I wasn't speaking about that so much—poor Tatiana Ivanovna! What a life hers has been, and what a blackguard that Obnoskin is—look at that now; I'm calling him a blackguard and yet I was going to do exactly the same thing—marry her; but all this is digression; did you hear what that detestable Mrs. Obnoskin shouted out about Nastia?"

"Yes, uncle; I hope you realise now, that there is no time to be lost."

"Of course, of course. We must get the matter done at any cost," replied my uncle; "the solemn moment has arrived. But, my dear fellow, there was one thing that you and I forgot to consider last night, and that is—will she marry me? that's the thing. I thought of it all night."

"Why, of course, uncle; didn't she say she loved you?"

"Yes, but she added that nothing would induce her to marry me."

"Oh, my dear uncle, that's only a way of speaking—it means nothing. Besides, the circumstances are very different to-day."

"Do you really think so? I don't know, it's a delicate matter—a very delicate matter. Do you know, in spite of all the worry and anxiety of my heart all night, I was sensible of a most delightful under-feeling of happiness. Well, good bye, old fellow, for the present. I am late as it is—by the bye—good-gracious! what an old fool I am, I've forgotten the main thing I came to tell you. I wrote to him last night—to Thomas, I mean. I sent him the letter early this morning and told him that I *felt* myself bound, *absolutely* bound, you know, to make a proposal of marriage to Nastia. I begged him to say nothing about what he had seen in the garden, and said that I threw myself upon his generosity of soul to help me, as much as he could, with my mother. Of course, I did not express myself properly, but I wrote from my very heart and, as it were, watered the letter with my tears."

"Well; and haven't you got an answer?"

"Not yet; but early in the morning I met him at the door just before we went off to catch Tatiana, he was dressed in dressing-gown and slippers and nightcap. He didn't say a word or even look at me. I peered into his face, but I couldn't see that anything was the matter with him."

"Uncle, don't trust to him in this matter, he will injure your cause."

"No, no, my boy, I don't believe it," said my uncle, "I don't—especially as it's my last hope—he'll understand, he'll appreciate the position; he'll fume and scold, I daresay; but when matters come to the point he will shine out like a pearl, I'm sure of it. You talk like this, Seigey, because you haven't seen him at his best yet. Good heavens! if he were really to let out my secret, I really don't know what I should do; there would be nothing left to trust in the world. But no, he couldn't be such a blackguard. I am not worthy to button his boots—don't shake your head—I am not indeed!"

"Colonel! colonel! Your mother is asking after you," cried the shrill voice of Miss Pereplitsin, who had probably listened to every word that we had said through the open window. "We have been looking all over the house for you."

"Good heavens! I'm late," said uncle; "look here, do be a good fellow and dress and come up there too. I came here

chiefly to get you to go with me. I'm coming—I'm coming in a minute!" he shouted.

Lest alone, I thought of my conversation with Nastia this morning early, and was glad I had told uncle nothing about it—it would only have upset him even more than he was already. I foresaw the greatest obstacles to our bold plans, and could not for the life of me imagine how uncle would steer clear of them and make his proposal to Nastia. I had the fullest confidence in uncle's good intentions, but at the same time the strongest doubts of his ability to carry them out.

At all events, there was no time to lose, and it was clearly my duty to help him; so I hastened to dress; but I was too long coming, I suppose, for all my hastening; because before I was ready, in came Misinchikoff.

"I have come for you," he said; "the colonel begs you to be as quick as you can."

"Come along then."

I was quite ready now, and we went out.

"What's the news up there?" I asked, as we walked along.

"They are all in Thomas's study having a confab," said Misinchikoff. "Thomas is not in one of his capricious moods, but he appears to be very thoughtful, and is not talking at all. He even kissed Iliusha, which of course put the colonel into an ecstasy of joy. He gave us to understand that we were not to congratulate him upon his birthday, because he had only wished to see what we would do. The old woman is quiet too, because Thomas is. No one has said a word about our chivvy of this morning, because Thomas has not touched upon it. He has not allowed anyone to come near him all the morning, although Mrs. General begged him by all the saints to come and confab with her, and even knocked at his door herself till her knuckles were bare; but, he would not let her in, and said he was praying for the human race, or something of that sort! He is plotting something, that's very clear from his face; but your uncle not being the kind of man to suspect anything from anyone's facial expression, of course he is in a state of ecstatic delight. Thomas's amiability. He is a downright child, is your uncle! Iliusha has got up some verses to recite and I was sent to bring you to the performance."

"And what about Tatiana Ivanovna?"

"Well, what about her?"

"Is she there with them?"

"No, she is in her room," said Misinchikoff drily. "She is resting after her journey—and doing a little crying; perhaps she is a little ashamed of herself, too. That governess girl is with her just now. I think we are going to have a thunder-storm, just look at those clouds!"

I looked overhead and quite agreed with him; the sky was black and threatening. At this moment we reached the terrace.

"What do you think of that fellow Obnoskin?" I asked, for I was very curious to hear what Misinchikoff's private opinion upon our little adventure might be.

"Don't speak to me about him. Don't remind me of the blackguard!" he cried, stopping, red and furious, and stamping his foot. "Fool, ass, that he is to go and spoil my splendid idea! Listen; of course I'm a fool too for trusting him; but I assure you that if he had managed the business properly, I could have forgiven him for cheating me like this. Fool, fool! How are such people tolerated in society? Why aren't they sent to Siberia, or sold for galley slaves or something? But I am not beaten yet, my good sir! Because a silly fool like that chooses to rob me of an idea and bungle it in the execution, I am not to give up proprietorship of that idea! Tatiana must marry somebody, it's her mission; and the reason that nobody has popped her into a lunatic asylum as yet, is because someone may marry her still. Now, I'll just tell you my new idea."

"Better tell me afterwards," I said, "for here we are."

"All right, I'll tell you afterwards," said Misinchikoff with a smile. "And now—but where are you off to? I tell you we are to go to Thomas's study—you don't know the way, I see; follow me—this way for the domestic comedy; it *is* a comedy, you know."

CHAPTER III.

THOMAS occupied two large and handsome rooms, both of which were furnished far better than any others in the house. There was pretty fresh paper on the walls, silk curtains

over the windows, carpets, fire-place, handsome furniture—in fact, everything to show the careful solicitude of Thomas's hosts towards his august person.

Pots of flowers stood in the windows and on little marble stands before them. There was a large table in the middle of the study, with a big ink-bottle and a bundle of pens, to prove the immensity of Thomas's intellectual labours.

I may mention here that when Thomas left us for a better life, we looked through the literary results of his eight years of labour among us, but discovered nothing except a mass of unfinished rubbish—for instance, the beginning of a historical novel which was supposed to refer to Novgorod in the 7th century. Then a long and wonderful poem entitled "Anachoret in the cemetery," all in blank verse; also an idiotic dissertation upon the "Nature and Characteristics of the Russian Moujik and how to treat him;" and, lastly, a novel called "Countess Blousky," which was also unfinished. Nothing else! And yet Thomas had always made my poor uncle spend untold sums in journals and magazines, and so on, most of which periodicals we found afterwards still uncut. I may state that I very often used to catch Thomas reading French novels, but he always hid them if anybody came near.

There was a glass door let into the wall of the study, communicating direct with the yard of the house. We found them all waiting for us. Thomas Tomich was sitting in a comfortable arm-chair, in a sort of long coat, down to his heels, but had no necktie on. He certainly was very quiet and thoughtful.

When we came in, he lifted his head and looked inquisitively at me; I bowed, and he responded with a slight but courteous inclination. Mrs. General observing that Thomas had received me politely, smiled and nodded her head, too. She was as happy as possible that Thomas had taken so little notice of Tatiana's elopement.

Behind her chair, as usual, was the Perepatsin, with her thin lips compressed, and a nasty smile on her face, rubbing her skinny hands one over the other. There were one or two old women present, friends of Mrs. General, come to congratulate her on Iliusha's name-day. My Aunt Proskovia was huddled away somewhere in a corner, and stared thence at Thomas and Mrs. General in fear and trembling. My uncle was seated in an arm-chair with little Iliusha standing before him; he looked radiantly happy.

Iliusha had a smart red blouse on and looked very pretty and neat. Sásha and Nastia were cramming him with some verses or other which he was to recite, in order to please his father, and prove the progress he had made in his studies.

Uncle was almost crying for joy ; the urbanity of Thomas, Mrs. General's amiability, the name-day verses, all combined to bring him to the limits of good humour and happiness. Sásha, too, looked as delighted and merry as a little child—even Nastia smiled to see her, though the governess had come in a moment before looking tired and miserable. Bachchéef was also there, still sad and hungry, and apparently determined to take no part in the general good humour and happiness.

Old Edgevikin was there too, kissing everybody's hands and paying wild compliments as usual. He came up to me with a low bow when I entered ; he did not look at all as though he had come to protect his daughter and to take her away for good.

"Here he is!" cried uncle gleefully on seeing us. "Listen here! Iliusha has been getting up some verses to recite, I sent for you on purpose, and we have been waiting till you came to hear him. Sit down here. Come, Thomas, confess you put him up to all this so as to provide a pleasant surprise for his old father. I dare swear you did."

If uncle could talk like that in Thomas's room, surely all must be well! The worst of it was, though, uncle was not the man to read faces, as Misinchikoff had said. When I looked at Thomas's face, I could not help agreeing with the former and thinking with him that we might expect something stormy before we had done.

"Oh, don't bother yourself about me, never mind me, colonel," said Thomas, in the voice of a man forgiving his enemy. "Of course I esteem a pleasant surprise, for it is evidence of the good feeling of your children ; verses are good, too, even if we consider simply the practice in pronunciation which they afford ; but I had other things than verses to think of all the morning, colonel ; I was on my knees—you must be aware of it! however, I am ready to listen to the verses, and in the meantime I have congratulated Iliusha and kissed him."

"You did, you did, Thomas! but look here, don't think I doubt your friendship, or anything of that sort, even if I did forget about your prayers just then! Sergey, kiss the boy again—look at him, just look at that, there's a boy for you, eh? Now then, Iliusha, begin. I suppose it's something solemn, an ode

of Lomanosoff's, or something of that sort." Uncle was simply beaming with joy, he could hardly keep still in his chair for happiness.

"No, father, it's not Lomanosoff," cried Sásha, with difficulty restraining her laughter. "We thought, as you are a soldier and have fought the enemy, that Iliusha had better learn something about warfare and all that, 'The Siege of Pamba' it's called, father."

"The Siege of Pamba? hem! I don't recollect it. What is it, Sergey? What is Pamba? something mythological, I suppose?"

"Now, then, Iliusha, off!" cried Sásha.

"For nine years did Pedro Gomez," began Iliusha, shyly, in his little thin clear voice, without any stops—in the usual childish style of reciting poetry :

"For nine years did Pedro Gomez
Sit without the fort of Pamba,
Simple milk his only victual;
And the army of Don Pedro—
Thousands nine of brave Castilians,
To a solemn vow obedient,
Fed on milk and ate no solids!"

"What? how—what did they do that for?" cried uncle, staring at me in amazement.

"Go on, Iliusha," said Sásha, "give us some more."

"Every day Don Pedro Gomez
Did bewail his wretched weakness,
With his mantle wrapped about him.
'Twas the eleventh year approaching,
And the foe was still triumphant!
While of poor Don Pedro's army
Only nineteen men were left."

"Oh, what nonsense!" cried uncle, bewildered. "Why, how could that be? only nineteen men left out of the whole army—and a pretty large army too! How can that have been?"

Here Sásha could not hold it in any longer and burst out into the most delightful childish laughter; and though there was not much to laugh at in reality, one could not possibly look at the child and refrain from joining in.

"Why, father, they are nonsense verses!" she cried, delighted with her little plot; "they are written on purpose to make people laugh!"

"Oh, they are nonsense verses, are they?" cried uncle gaily, "comic, you mean! of course, of course. I see, and very good they are too—feeding a whole army on milk for some vow! What a fool he was to take the vow, wasn't he, Thomas? You see, mother, these are comic verses; the best writers write comic ~~verses~~ sometimes! Don't they, Sergey?—Well go on, Iliusha—what happened then?"

"Only nineteen men could muster,
So Don Pedro called a council
And addressed them: "Nineteen warriors!
Let us take our flags and standards
Down, and blow our biggest trumpet,
Strike our hugest kettledrum,
And depart from Pamba's castle
Though our foe is still inside it,
And although we have not got it;
For our fame and glory will not
Suffer, if we court attention
To the fact that all this time, we
Haven't eaten, not so much as
Any flea might—for we vowed to
Live on milk and nothing but it,
And on milk we've lived (and died too)."

"That's all, father."

"Finished is it? Well, there was nothing else to be done—was there, Sásha? Capital, Iliusha! well done, it was very good, my boy. Who put him up to this, was it you, Sásha?"

"No, it was Nastia. We read these verses the other day and she said we should teach them to Iliusha to recite on his name-day."

Thomas Tomich had sat as silent as a judge through it all—only a jesting, sarcastic smile curled his lip now and then.

Uncle was radiant. "I love poets," he said, "they are capital fellows; do you remember, Sergey, I met a literary man at your rooms one day?—he had a very big nose, I remember—what did you say, Thomas?"

Thomas had laughed aloud at that moment.

"Oh nothing, nothing! go on, please," he observed, appearing to find great difficulty in repressing his mirth; "go on, colonel, I'll have my say after you're done. Here's Mr. Bachchées, listening with avidity to hear about your literary experiences in St. Petersburg."

"Look here, Thomas, you'd better not provoke me!" said Bachchées, flushing up with anger and twisting round in his

chair to glare at Thomas with his little red eyes. "What the devil have I got to do with your literature? authors are a set of humbugs and gymnasts and nothing more!"

"No, no! not at all," said uncle. "There's Voltaire now, he was bitter, cynical and all that, of course, but he was by no means a humbug. I can't make out why every one is so down on poor Voltaire."

Thomas Tomich laughed loud and long, while poor uncle stared at him with open mouth, in a state of sad bewilderment and confusion.

"No, Thomas, you see, I was leading up to the subject of magazines and journals; you were quite right, Thomas, we ought to take more of them in, it is simply a case of refusing enlightenment as it were; every good son of his country ought to do his best—oughtn't he, Sergey?—to improve his mind. You know, I think the hottest book we've got, in the way of science, is that thick one—don't you know the one I mean?—it has a yellow cover I remember—"

"'Notes of our Fatherland,' papa."

"Yes, yes, that's it, 'Notes of our Fatherland.' What a noble title, eh, Sergey? You can picture the whole of the patriotic population sitting and writing notes; it's a splendid book, that, and it's so fat, too—you just put your nose into it and look at the size of it, it'll make your hair curl, my boy! I know I only meant to look at a page or two and I read three chapters right off, and my mouth opened wider and wider as I read. And do you know what it was all about? it told you the meaning of, for instance, 'a broom,' 'a spade,' and all sorts of things; it told you all sorts of things you didn't expect, you know, about emblems, and all that!"

I don't know how Thomas would have acted under this last sally of uncle's; but just at this moment, Gavril appeared at the door, and with an air of great dejection, stood there, silent.

Thomas glanced at him significantly.

"Is it ready, Gavril?" he asked, in feeble but determined tones.

"Quite ready, sir," replied Gavril, in a tragically lugubrious voice, and sighing deeply.

"And have you put my bundle into the cart?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very well then, I'm ready too," said Thomas, rising from

his chair. Uncle looked at him in amazement. Mrs. General jumped up in great agitation and gazed around the room.

"Allow me, now, colonel," began Thomas, with dignity, "to beg you to let literary subjects alone for a moment, you shall continue your learned remarks afterwards, if you like, ~~without~~ me. As I am now about to *bid you farewell for ever*, I should like to say a few words—last words—before I go."

Amazement and terror took possession of all present.

"Thomas, Thomas! what's the matter with you? Why—where are you going to?" cried uncle, at last.

"I am about to leave your house," said Thomas, with the utmost composure. "It is my intention to go forth whithersoever my eyes lead me, and I have engaged a common peasant cart for my journey, at my own expense. In that cart now repose my little bundle—a very small one—just a few favourite books, a couple of changes of linen, and nothing more. I am poor, colonel, but not for all the world would I now accept your gold; as you are aware I refused it at your hands yesterday—"

"For heaven's sake, Thomas, tell me what you mean!" cried poor uncle, as white as a napkin.

Mrs. General shrieked and gazed despairingly at Thomas, with her hands stretched out towards him. Miss Pereplitsin rushed to support her; the old women sat petrified in their places; Bachchœf rose heavily from his seat.

"Now then, the fun is about to commence," he whispered.

At this moment the sound of distant thunder was heard; a storm was beginning outside, too.

CHAPTER IV.

"YOU ask me what I mean by all this, colonel," said Thomas Tomich, solemnly, and as though enjoying the general confusion. "I am astonished at the question. Kindly explain to me how *you* happen to be able to look me in the face; explain this last psychological problem of human shamelessness—then I shall leave the house with, at all events,

the satisfaction of having learned the newest development of the depravity of mankind."

But uncle was not in a position to reply; he stared at Thomas Tomich frightened and bewildered, with open mouth and rolling eyes.

"Good heavens! what dreadful passions some people have!" groaned Miss Pereplitsin.

"Understand me, colonel," Thomas continued, "you had better let me go out of your house without asking me questions and without ado. In this place even I, a man of mature age and knowledge of the world, even I have begun to be seriously alarmed for my moral purity. I assure you any questions you may ask me can lead to nothing but your own shame and exposure."

"Thomas Tomich!" cried my uncle, and a cold sweat stood on his forehead.

"And therefore, allow me to make a few parting observations without entering into any such details, the last words I shall ever speak, colonel, in your house. The mischief is done, and can't be undone. I hope that you understand what I refer to, when I say 'mischief.' Yet I pray you once more, on my knees, if a single spark of morality be left in your guilty heart, stem, I beseech you, the torrent of your evil passions, perhaps the pestilential poison is not ablaze over all your system, oh! quench the fire, conquer it!"

"Thomas! I assure you you are labouring under a delusion!" cried my uncle, gradually coming to himself, but still trembling with agitation over Thomas's sudden announcement of his departure.

"Yes! conquer your passion," continued Thomas, as though he had not heard my uncle's ejaculation. "Believe me, 'whosoever wants to conquer the world must first conquer himself!' that is my invariable rule. You are a landlord, your duty is to shine forth like a diamond among your dependents! and what an example you are setting at present, what a miserable example, by your low immorality! I prayed all night for your happiness; but my prayers were in vain, your happiness lies in virtue."

"Oh, Thomas! this is impossible—you are labouring under a delusion. You have entirely misunderstood what you are referring to."

"Therefore, remember that you are a landlord," continued Thomas again, ignoring my uncle; "and do not suppose that

ease and voluptuousness constitute the solemn duty of landlords. Pernicious thoughts! Not ease, but work and responsibility before heaven and the Czar and the fatherland. You must work—it is your duty. Work like the meanest serf on your estate."

"What! must I plough and mow, too?" asked Bachchée, "must I do the moujik's work on my estate? I also am a landlord."

But Thomas took no more notice of him than of my uncle:

"I will now say a word or two to you servants," he continued, addressing Gavril and Thalaley who stood at the door. "Loye your masters and obey their orders implicitly, and they will love you again. And you, colonel, be just to them and sympathetic."

"Thomas Tomich! dear dear Thomas! Why are you taking leave like this?" shrieked Mrs. General in despair.

"Well, that's all I have to say, I think," Thomas continued, not even noticing Mrs. General. "As to details, don't delay to cut your grass, colonel; and I strongly advise you *not* to clear that forest you think of cutting down; but I will send you my advice on these points by post, meanwhile, good-bye all—my blessing be on you; bless you too, my child" (to Iliusha), "and heaven protect you from the venom of your future passions. Bless you, too, Thalaley, and mind you forget that improper song—good-bye all, remember Thomas Tomich! Come along, Gavril, put me in the cart."

And Thomas made for the door with dignified composure. Mrs. General rushed after him and fell on his neck.

"No, no, Thomas! I cannot let you go like this," cried my uncle following him and seizing his hand.

"That is, you intend to use force to prevent me?" asked Thomas haughtily.

"Yes, force if need be," cried uncle, trembling with agitation; "you have said too much—you must explain your words. I tell you, you have misunderstood my letter."

"Your letter!" yelled Thomas firing up at once, as though he had been awaiting this moment for an outburst. "Your letter—here it is, here's your letter! I tear it to pieces and I spit upon it—there's your letter. I trample it under my feet, and in doing so I am performing my solemn duty to humanity. There! that's what I do with your letter, if you insist upon

explanations. Look, look!" and the torn bits of paper fluttered about the room.

"I tell you, Thomas, you misunderstand me," cried my uncle, growing paler and paler; "I am offering her my hand, Thomas; it is all for my own happiness."

"Your hand! you are deceiving this young woman, and trying to deceive me too, offering her your hand; just as if I had not *seen* you with her yesterday, at night time, and in the garden, among the bushes."

Mrs. General shrieked and fell fainting into an arm-chair; there arose a dreadful flutter in the dove-cot. Poor Nastia sat still, pale as death. Sàsha, terrified, seized little Iwusha, and stood trembling as though in a fit of ague.

"Thomas," cried my uncle, beside himself, "if you reveal this secret you will be guilty of the most scoundrelly act in the world."

"I *do* reveal the secret," yelled Thomas, "and in doing so I am performing a noble and conscientious act. I have been sent by God for the purpose of convicting this sinful world of its filthiness. I am ready to take my stand on the roof of the nearest cottage and publish your vile act to every person near and to every passer-by. Yes, yes; know it, all of you here present, that last night I found him and this young woman, who looks as innocent as possible, in the garden, among the bushes."

"Oh, shame, shame!" said Miss Pereplitsin.

"Thomas, I warn you," cried my uncle, closing his fists and with eyes flashing.

"And he, naturally alarmed that I should have caught him under the circumstances," continued Thomas, "dared to send me a lying letter—to me, an honest and right-minded man—justifying his crime—yes, crime—for out of a hitherto innocent young woman you have made—"

"One more insulting word against her, Thomas, and I'll kill you—I swear it."

"I say that word. I declare that of a hitherto innocent girl you have made a depraved—the most depraved of women."

Hardly had Thomas spoken the last word when my uncle laid hold of his shoulder, twisted him round about like a wisp of straw, and hurled him with all his force against the glass door leading from the study into the back-yard. So violent was the impetus given to the wretched carcass of Thomas that the locked door burst wide open, and the great man, flying

head over heels down the six or seven stone steps leading to the yard, lay quiescent and at full length on the flags at the bottom, accompanied and surrounded by bits of shattered glass.

"Gavril, pick him up," cried my uncle, as pale as death, "pick him up and put him in the cart, and see that within a couple of minutes there's not a sign of him in or about Stepánchikoff."

Whatever may have been Thomas's intentions, I feel sure that he never had any idea of this particular form of departure from my uncle's house.

I will not attempt to describe the first few moments which succeeded this exciting scene: the soul-taking sobs of Mrs. General, who lay swooning in her chair; the amazement of Miss Pereplitsin at this most unusual exhibition on the part of my invariably peaceable uncle; the "ohs" and the "ochs" of the hangers-on; the fright of Nastia, whose father was busy wringing his hands over her; the wild terror of little Sáša; my uncle, in inexpressible agitation, walking up and down the room, waiting for his mother to recover consciousness; and the sonorous weeping of Thalaley--all this formed a scene which may be imagined but cannot be described. I will only add that at this moment the threatening thunderstorm burst overhead, the claps came louder and oftener, and a heavy rain rattled against the windows.

"This is a pretty sort of a holiday," whispered Bachchéef to me.

"A bad business," I said, beside myself with agitation; "but at all events they've kicked Thomas out, and they're not likely to take him back now."

• "Mamma, are you better? can you listen to me?" asked my uncle, stopping in front of Mrs. General's chair.

Mrs. General raised her head, and looked beseechingly at her son; she had never seen him in such a state before.

"Mamma," he continued, "the cup was too full, you must have seen it yourself. I did not want to end the matter so, but the hour struck, and it had to be done." You have heard this man's disgusting calumny; now listen to the truth, mamma. I love this most generous and most noble girl: I have long loved her, and shall always love her. She will make my children happy, and will be a dutiful daughter to you; and, therefore, here in the presence of yourself and of these friends and rela-

tions, I solemnly repeat my petition at her feet, and pray her with all my heart to do me the great honour to consent to be my wife."

Nastia trembled, then flushed all over and started up from her seat. Mrs. General stared at her son as though she had not taken in what he said to her; then, of a sudden, with a cry of woe, she fell on her knees before him:

"Egor, Egor; dear Egor, fetch Thomas Tomich back," she cried: "fetch him back at once, or I shall die before evening, without him."

"Mother," began uncle solemnly, "I can only suppose that you did not hear a word of what I have just been saying to you." He was like one stupified, so amazed was he to see his old mother, generally so arbitrary and domineering, now on her knees before him. An expression of anguish flitted over his face as he hastened to pick her up and put her back into an arm-chair: "You cannot have heard, mother," he repeated.

"Fetch Thomas Tomich back, fetch him back; dear Egor, fetch him. I can't live without him."

"Mother, I cannot take him back; I cannot, and I have no right to do so,—understand that. After his base, and black-guardly, and scandalous lies about this angel of purity and virtue, it is impossible. You must understand, mother, that I am in honour bound, and bound in every way, to insist upon the fullest recognition of this lady's absolute innocence and virtue. Listen, mother; I tell you that I am entreating for the hand of this lady, and I implore you to give your blessing to the union."

Mrs. General jumped up again, and fell on her knees before Nastia, this time.

"Oh, don't—don't marry him!" she shrieked; "don't marry him—persuade him to fetch Thomas back again. Nastia, my angel! I'll give you anything, everything, if only you won't marry him. I have not spent quite all I had; I still have a little money left from my old husband; I'll sacrifice all to you; and Egor will give you something too, I'm sure, only don't push me alive into my grave, give me back Thomas Tomich. Persuade him to let Thomas come back."

She would have continued her prayers and lamentations for ever, if the Pereplitsin and several other old women had not fallen upon her, with screams and groans and moanings, and

picked her up. They did not like to see their benefactress on her knees before a paid governess.

Poor Nastia could hardly stand up, through terror; and Miss Pereplitsin cried with rage.

"You are murdering your own mother!" she yelled in, uncle's face; "and as for you, miss" (to Nastia), "allow me to tell you that you are setting a son against a mother, which is a thing forbidden by Providence, and—"

"Miss Pereplitsin, hold your tongue; I have borne enough," cried uncle.

"Yes, and I have borne enough from you, too. You think to reproach me with my dependence, do you? No, sir; I am not your slave yet, thank you. You are not perhaps aware that I am the daughter of a major—and not a foot of mine shall rest in your house after to-day; no, sir, not a foot."

But uncle did not hear this eloquent tirade; he had stepped across to Nastia, and now held her hand very respectfully.

"Nastia, you heard my proposal?" he said quietly; his face was full of anguish, almost despair.

"No, no, colonel; we'd better—better—leave it as it is," said poor Nastia, quite beside herself with bewilderment and confusion. "It's no use," she added, pressing his hand and bursting into tears, "you are doing this because of yesterday, I know; but it cannot be, you must see for yourself. It is all a mistake—I—I shall never forget you as—as my benefactor, and I will pray for you always—always."

Tears interrupted her speech, and she stopped.

Poor uncle evidently expected this answer, and he had no idea of trying to persuade the girl, or insisting upon her acceptance of his offer. He merely stood before her, with bent head, silent and utterly cast down, but still holding her hand. His eyes were full of tears.

"I told you yesterday," Nastia continued, "that I can never be your wife. You can see for yourself they don't want me here. I foresaw it all; your mother would never give us her blessing. There are others, too, opposed to our union. You yourself, although you would very likely never confess it, could not be happy with me; you are a noble-hearted man, and with your generous nature—"

"Yes, generous, that's the word, Nastia. Well done," said her father here.

"I do not wish to be the cause of dissension in your house,"

Nastia continued, " and as for myself, you needn't be anxious about me, nobody can touch or harm me, for I shall go back to my father to-day. Let us bid farewell to each other, it—it is better over," and poor Nastia again burst into tears.

"Oh, Nastia, surely that is not your last word?" said uncle, gazing into her eyes with inexpressible anguish and despair.

"Yes, colonel, it is her last word," said Nastia's father, "and she has expressed herself so well that I really would not have believed it of her. You are the most generous of men, colonel, and you have done us a great honour, too great an honour for the like of us. We are not your equals, you see, your wife ought to be rich, and lovely, and influential, and accustomed to silks, and feathers, and diamonds, and all that; perhaps, then, even Thomas Tomich might make an exception, and give his blessing to the match, and you'd take Thomas back, for he's a fine generous-hearted man is Thomas. And now he is getting wet, poor fellow. It was a pity to send him out in the rain. Hadn't you better fetch him back at once? You'll have to get him back some time or other, so why not now?"

"Yes, call him back, call him back!" cried Mrs. General again. "What he says is quite true, Egor. Call him back; oh, call him back, quick!"

"There's your mother, too, killing herself about it all," continued the old fellow, "so you'd better just fetch him in, and Nastia and I will be off at once."

"Stop, for goodness' sake, not another word!" cried uncle, turning away to the corner, and covering his face with his hands. He threw himself into an arm-chair, as though to try to collect his thoughts.

At this moment a fearful clap of thunder shook the very house. It seemed to have burst just over our heads. Everyone appeared to lose their presence of mind. Mrs. General screamed, so did Miss Pechlitsin, and so did all the old women. All present crossed themselves.

"God help us, it's Elias's day," murmured five or six voices round the room:

Following the clap of thunder, such a flood of rain fell of a sudden that all Stepánchikoff looked as though it were converted into a lake in an instant of time.

"What will become of Thomas Tomich out in this storm?" observed Miss Pechlitsin.

"Call him back, Egor, call him back!" cried the despairing voice of Mrs. General, and she flew to the door like one possessed. In an instant she was surrounded by her old women, who cooed, and scolded, and chattered, and fawned over her. It was a real pandemonium.

"He went out in his indoor clothes. If he had only taken a greatcoat, at least! Not even an umbrella; the lightning will kill him," remarked Miss Pereplitsin once more.

"It will, indeed; and the rain—how wet he'll get!" put in Bachchéef.

"Do be quiet," I said.

"But, my dear sir, the man is a man, and not a dog. How would you like to go out in this rain?" answered the old fellow, wrathfully.

Foreseeing a catastrophe if this sort of thing went on, I approached my uncle, who seemed to have turned to stone in his chair.

"Uncle," I said in his ear, "surely you will never agree to bring Thomas back? Remember, it would not even be decent, at all events while Nastia is in the house."

"My dear fellow," said uncle, looking up at me with determination in his eyes, "I have been thinking it over, and I know now what course I must take. Don't be afraid, there shall be no offence to Nastia. I know now how to manage it all."

He rose from his place, and approached Mrs. General.

"Mother," he said, "calm yourself; I will call Thomas back, I will catch him up myself, he cannot have got far yet; but I solemnly swear to you that he shall come back, on one condition only. Here, in the presence of all those who witnessed his insulting remarks, he shall acknowledge his guilt, and solemnly ask pardon of this most noble-hearted young lady. I insist upon this; I *must* have it, otherwise he shall not cross the threshold of my door. And I swear to you, mother, that if he agrees to my demand, I shall be ready to throw myself at his feet, and to give him anything he likes, all I *can* give without robbing my children. As for myself, I shall depart this very day. The star of my fortune has set. I shall leave Stepanchikoff. Live here quietly and happily, all of you. I shall join my regiment, and in the storms of war, and excitement of the battle-field, I shall be able to bear my disappointed life somehow; but I have said enough, now I am going."

At this moment the door opened, and Gavril, drenched

through and through, dirty and muddy to a perfectly indescribable pitch, appeared before the eyes of the amazed spectators.

"What's the matter? Where have you come from? Where's Thomas?" shouted uncle, approaching him hurriedly.

We all surrounded Gavril, and stared at him with thirsty curiosity, as he stood with the dirty water dripping off him in streams. Cries and groans and lamentations accompanied every word he said.

"I left him in the little birch wood about a mile from here," he began in a whining voice; "the horse shied at the lightning, and backed into the ditch."

"Well?" shouted uncle.

"The cart upset."

"Well, and Thomas?"

"Fell out into the ditch, sir."

"Go on, go on, don't torture me!"

"He said he hurt his side, and he cried, sir. I unharnessed the horse, and came here on its back to tell you."

"And Thomas stayed there?"

"He got up, and went a little further with a stick," said Gavril with a sigh, and hanging his head.

"My horse!" shouted uncle, and rushed out of the room.

A horse was brought round, and uncle jumped on its back, unsaddled as it was, and galloped out of the yard. The clatter of the horse's hoofs along the road bore testimony to the speed of uncle's pursuit after Thomas. The colonel had not even stayed to put a hat on.

The ladies flew to the windows. In the midst of sobs and groans came scraps of counsel. A warm bath must be got ready; Thomas must be rubbed with spirits of wine; tea must be prepared, and something to eat, for poor Thomas had not tasted a scrap of food to-day. Miss Pereplitsin found Thomas's spectacles in a case, apparently forgotten, and this discovery produced a great effect; Mrs. General seized them, and clasped them tight in her hand, as she gazed frenziedly out of the window. The excitement at length became strained to the last degree; Sàsha was consoling Nastia in one corner, both were crying and kissing each other. Nastia held one of Iliusha's hands, and continually strained him to her breast, bidding farewell to her beloved little pupil; Iliusha was crying like mad, without the slightest idea of the cause; Edgevikin and Misinchikoff were talking about something or other in another corner;

I spoke to Bachchées, who looked rather as though he intended to join in the general lamentations.

"No, no!" he said, "don't you be afraid, my good young sir. Thomas has not gone yet. You'll see he'll clear the house of its masters before he's done, and stay in it himself."

The thunderstorm having passed over, Mr. Bachchées had evidently changed his view of the circumstances of the case. At last, somebody at the window called out, "here they come," and all the ladies ran to the door with sobs and cries. Ten minutes had not elapsed since uncle started off; surely he could not be bringing Thomas home already? However, the mystery was explained very simply afterwards—it appeared that Thomas, when Gavril left him, had certainly limped away, onwards, with a stick; but finding himself quite alone and in the midst of the thunder and lightning, he had thought better of it and run after Gavril again, back to Stepanchikoff. Uncle met him in the village, and had stopped a passing cart, and with the help of some moujiks who ran up, popped the now humble and quiet Thomas into it. And so Thomas was restored to the arms of Mrs. General, who was quite beside herself with dismay to see him in such a dreadful condition. He was even wetter and dirtier than Gavril. The uproar became still louder now, Thomas must be taken upstairs immediately, and his clothes changed, everybody spoke at once and all prescribed different remedies, but Thomas seemed to hear and observe nothing.

He was assisted to a chair, and slumped into it, and then he immediately shut his eyes. Somebody called out that he was dying—and there arose a frightful hullabaloo, but the loudest blubbering of all was Thalaley's, who was trying hard to push through the crowd of gentry in order to kiss Thomas's hand.

CHAPTER V.

"WHERE am I?" asked Thomas at last, in the voice of one dying in a good cause.

"The d— fool," said Misinchikoff to me, "he pretends not to know where he has been brought to. Now there'll be the deuce to pay!"

" You are with us, Thomas—amongst friends," cried uncle, " be calm and don't worry yourself just now; and I really think you had better change your dress, Thomas, you'll catch cold—won't you have a pick-me-up, eh ! Just a small glass of something nice—to warm you a bit, you know ? "

" I could take a little malaga, I think," murmured Thomas with his eyes shut.

" Malaga. I'm afraid we haven't any," said uncle doubtfully.

" Not got any—of course we have, four whole bottles !" said Aunt Proskovia ; and off she ran with the keys. All the other ladies fluttered about. Thomas like flies over a pot of jam. Bachchéef was very angry.

" Malaga, indeed ! a wine nobody ever sees, unless it's a blackguard like himself. Malaga ! tsu ! what am I waiting here for, I wonder ? bosh, malaga ! "

" Thomas," commenced my uncle, halting at every word ; " now that you are rested and are with us all again—that is—I I wanted to say, Thomas, that since just now, you accused an innocent person—"

" Where, oh where is my innocence ? " cried Thomas, as one in a state of delirium ; " where are the golden days of my innocence ? Where art thou, my sweet childhood, what time I was wont to ramble, beautiful and guileless, over the meadows in pursuit of the gorgeous vernal butterfly ? Where, oh where are those days ? Give me back my innocence—give, oh give it back ! " And Thomas stretched out his hands and applied to us each in turn, by look and gesture, as though his innocence were in somebody's pocket.

Bachchéef was very nearly bursting with rage.

" Listen to what the silly ass says ! " he growled ; " give him back his innocence, indeed ! Probably he was no less a scoundrel as a boy, than he is as a man. I dare swear he was ! "

" Thomas," uncle began once more.

" Where, oh, where are those days, when I believed in love and loved, myself ? " cried Thomas ; " when I could embrace a man and weep on his bosom ? and now, where am I, where am I ? "

" You are with us, Thomas, and this is what I wished to say to you—"

" Don't you think you could be quiet ? " said Miss Pereplitsin, with a nasty look in her sunken eyes.

" Where am I ? " continued Thomas ; " who are these about

me? Bulls, these are bulls; they are butting at me with their horns. Oh, life! what art thou? For we must live and live, and be dishonoured, and hated, and ruined, and when the earth is spread over our graves, then, and then only, do men remember us and build monuments over our poor bones."

"Good heavens! he's talking about graves now," said old Edgevikin.

"Oh, build no monuments over me," cried Thomas. "No, no; no monuments, let my only monument be in your hearts; no others, no others!"

"Thomas," interrupted uncle once again, "that's enough; listen to me now; never mind about monuments just at present. You see, Thomas, I quite understand that you may have been ablaze with noble rage when you reproached me just now; but you were led away, Thomas, in the cause of virtue, to—to a mistake; I assure you, you were mistaken, Thomas."

"Will you be quiet, sir!" cried Pereplitsin once more. "Do you wish to kill this poor man, just because you think he is in your power?"

Following her lead, Mrs. General and the whole bodyguard fell upon uncle, jabbering, and gesticulating with their hands, in their righteous anger that he should presume to continue talking at this solemn moment.

"Be quiet yourself, Miss Pereplitsin; I know well enough what I am saying," said uncle, with great determination. "This is a matter of right and wrong—of honour and dishonour. Thomas, you are a man of intelligence, you will understand that you are bound to ask pardon of the noble, generous girl whom you have insulted."

"What girl? What girl have I insulted?" asked Thomas, looking round in a bewildered way, as though he had entirely forgotten what had happened, and could not comprehend what uncle was talking about.

"Yes, Thomas, you have insulted her; but if you freely and fully admit your guilt I swear, Thomas, solemnly, that I shall be ready to fall at your feet, and then—"

"But whom have I insulted?" whined Thomas again. "What girl? Which girl? Where is she? Where is the girl? Do remind me of something connected with the girl you mean."

At this moment poor Nastia, confused and frightened, came up to the colonel and pulled him by the sleeve.

"No, colonel, let him alone, I don't want his apology. What is the use of all this? Leave the whole matter alone; drop it altogether."

"Oh! now I begin to recollect!" cried Thomas, "yes, I recollect. Oh, help me, help me to remember!" he begged, apparently in the greatest agitation; "tell me, is it true, is it true that I was cast out of this house like the maddest of dogs? Is it true that the lightning struck me? Is it true that I was pitched out of this door? Is it true, is this all true?"

The sobbing and lamentation of the female element in the room, was an eloquent answer to Thomas's question.

"Yes, yes!" he continued, "I remember now. I remember that after the lightning stroke and my fall, I rose and ran hither, pursued by the dreadful thunder, that I might do my duty ere I disappeared for ever and ever! Lift me up, please! Weak as I am, I must do my duty at once, and discharge my debt!"

There were hands enough ready to lift him and hold him up, and he stood like an orator, with arm outstretched.

"Colonel!" he cried, "now I am conscious once more; for the thunder has not utterly destroyed my reason. One of my ears is still deaf, probably more the result of my fall from this door than of the thunder. But what of that, and who cares for poor Thomas's ear?"

Thomas accompanied these last words with so pathetic and tragic an air, that the groans of the affected females once more rose, like a gust of noisy wind. All looked at uncle with reproachful and angry glances; poor uncle was gradually beginning to feel a little humbled under the deadly fire of so concentrated a battery.

"Now, listen to my confession," said Thomas, gazing proudly around the room. "And at the same time decide the fate of the unfortunate Thomas Opuskin. Colonel, I have long studied your character; you have not perhaps suspected it, but I have long studied you! I may possibly have made an error, colonel; but knowing your egotism, your boundless self love, your phenomenal sensuality, as I do, who can blame me if I trembled for the honour of her who is the most innocent of beings?"

"Thomas, do not digress more than you can help," said uncle, observing the suffering expression on Nastia's face.

"It was not so much the question of the innocence and

good faith of the person in question which disturbed me," continued Thomas, paying no attention to uncle's warning, "as her inexperience. I saw that a tender feeling was budding within her heart like a rose, and I remembered the words of Petrarch, that 'innocence is often but a hair's breadth apart from ruin.' I panted and groaned for her, and though I would have gladly guaranteed with all the blood in my body the absolute innocence of this maiden—pure as a pearl—yet who could go bail for *you*, colonel? knowing, as I did, the unrestrained passions of your heart, and knowing that you were ready to sacrifice anything, at any moment, for one minute's gratification of those feelings, I was suddenly filled with dreadful terror for the safety and for the fate of the most noble of maidens."

"Oh, Thomas, as if you could have thought all that!" cried poor uncle.

"In order to pacify my own heart's dread, I watched you. If you wish to know how I have suffered—go to Shakespeare; he will describe to you in his Hamlet the state of my heart at this time; I became suspicious and terrified. In my bewilderment and agitation I saw everything from the darkest side! How did you explain my desire—expressed to you yesterday—to get *her* out of the house? I wished to save her! Oh, who will re-establish my love and confidence in humanity! I feel that I have been unfair and exacting towards your guests, towards your nephew, and towards Mr. Bachchéef—but who will blame me, when they consider my then condition of mind? Go to Shakespeare again and you will understand! I thought I was born to and destined for misery—and you, colonel, you—misunderstanding the noblest sentiments of my soul, have never ceased to repay my loving care for you, with malice and ingratitude and jestings and humiliations!"

"Well, Thomas, if that is so, of course, I feel—" began my uncle, in great agitation.

"If you really feel at all, colonel, perhaps you will kindly hear me out without interrupting me? I continue: my whole fault lay in the fact that I was too solicitous for the welfare of this child here—for a child she is compared to yourself. My extreme love for mankind made of me, at the time, a demon of anger and suspicion; I felt ready to rush at my fellowmen and tear them to pieces; and you must understand, colonel, that all your actions, as though by the irony of

destiny, confirmed my suspicions, and went to make suspicion more suspicious. Do you know, when you offered me your gold, yesterday, I said to myself, 'he wishes to drive away the consciousness of guilt which comes home to him in my person, in order that he may the more easily consummate his crime.'"

"Good heavens, Thomas! did you really think that? and I never so much as suspected it."

"Heaven itself seemed to nurture my suspicions," continued Thomas, "and, consider, when blind chance led me to that fatal garden seat, last night,—what I must have felt to see before my very eyes my worst suspicions realised apparently in the most flagrant manner? Still, one hope, one forlorn hope was left to me, and that hope you yourself destroyed and pulverized this morning. You sent me a letter informing me of your intended marriage, and begging me not to divulge what I had seen. 'Oh,' I thought, 'why does he inform me now, after my discovery; why not before? Why did he not rush to my arms before—radiant and beautiful, for love beautifies any face; and there, on my breast, weep out all his joy and confide all, all in my loving bosom.' Am I a crocodile, that would have crushed instead of giving you sympathy? or am I some loathsome insect which would have bitten you instead of contributing to, by sharing in, your happiness? And again I thought 'why should he have sent for his nephew and betrothed him to this girl, except in order that he might deceive both us and this ingenuous young man, and so continue in his secret and abominable life of guilt?' No, colonel, if any one contributed to confirm my suspicion that your mutual love had degenerated into crime, it was yourself and none but you. Yes, and more! for you are guilty before this girl yourself, inasmuch as, by your awkwardness and suspicious egotism, you have given occasion for scandalous inferences as to the guilt of one who is as pure and guileless as any child."

Poor uncle sat silent, with his head bent over his bosom; he evidently felt himself to be a culprit, beneath the fire of Thomas's eloquence. Mrs. General and her crew silently and admiringly listened to Thomas, and Miss Peregrine glared at poor Nastia with an expression of triumphant malice.

"Overwhelmed and amazed," continued Thomas, "I locked myself up here and prayed for inspiration to do what was

right ; and at length I determined for the last time to try you publicly. I may have been too zealous, I may have given the reins to my irritation, but your reward for my generous*zeal on your behalf was to throw me out of the window. As I flew through the air I thought to myself, ' so is virtue rewarded all over the world : ' then I struck the earth and I can't remember much that has happened since."

The sobs and groans of the company here interrupted Thomas's tragic recital. Mrs. General flew towards him with the malaga, but he haughtily waved both her and the malaga away.

" Wait ! " he cried ; " I must finish. What happened after my fall I know not ; all I know is that here I stand, wet to the skin and ready to drop with fever, but resolved to go through with my intended work, which is to establish your mutual happiness. Colonel ! by many links of evidence, which need not now be specified, I am convinced at last that your love was pure, even, I may say, of an exalted type, though criminally deficient in the quality which prompts confidence in others. Humiliated, wronged, and suspected of insult to a young lady for whose honour I am ready, as a knight of the middle ages, to spill my last drop of blood, I have determined now to prove to you what sort of vengeance Thomas Toinich Opuiskin will wreak upon those who have wronged him. Give me your hand, colonel, if you please."

" With pleasure, Thomas," cried uncle. " As you have fully vindicated and given satisfaction to the honour of this, the most noble-minded young lady in the world, of course I will give you my hand, and with it the full recognition of your conduct." And uncle stretched out his hand with much warmth ; but having no notion of what was coming next.

" Give me your hand too, if you please," said Thomas faintly, pushing the crowd of women around him aside, and addressing Nastia.

Nastia, confused and bewildered, glanced timidly at Thomas

" Come along, come along, dear child, it is absolutely necessary for your happiness," added Thomas, caressingly, and still holding uncle's hand in his own.

" What on earth is the beggar up to now ? " said Misinchikoff.

Nastia, trembling with nervousness, walked timidly up to Thomas, and gave him her hand.

Thomas took the little hand and placed it in uncle's.

"I unite you two persons with my blessing," he said, in the most solemn way possible; "and if the blessing of a poor brother-sufferer may be permitted to avail you anything, then you will be happy indeed. Such is Thomas's vengeance, hurrah!"

The general amazement was simply beyond all bounds. The catastrophe was so entirely unexpected that it took everyone unawares, and converted the company into a set of motionless statues. Mrs. General remained as she had been a moment before, with her mouth open, and the bottle of malaga in her hand. Miss Pereplitsin stood still, trembling with malice and rage. The old women became a row of sculptured figures. My uncle shivered and tried to say something, but could not. Nastia trembled too, and grew as white as a sheet as she muttered something about "it cannot be;" but that sentiment was a little too late now.

Bachchéef was the first—let me do him the justice of recording it—to take up Thomas's hurrah. Then I shouted and after me came Sásha's loud yell as she sprang to her father and clasped him tight; then Iliusha cheered, then old Edgevikin, and lastly came Misinchikoff.

"Hurrah!" shouted Thomas again, "hurrah! down on your knees, children of my heart! down on your knees before the kindest of mothers! implore her blessing, and if need be I will kneel before her too, and unite my prayers with yours."

Uncle and Nastia, who had not even looked at one another as yet, frightened and half unconscious of what was going on, did fall on their knees before Mrs. General; but the old woman stood like a log and evidently had not the slightest idea of how she was expected to act. But Thomas rose to the emergency; he took the entreating off their hands, and Mrs. General's doubts and bewilderment vanished like smoke. She burst into tears and gave her consent to the union.

Uncle jumped up and folded Thomas to his heart.

"Thomas, Thomas!" he began, but his voice failed and he could not get any further.

"Champagne!" shouted Bachchéef. "Hurrah!"

"No, sir, not champagne, let us fall on our knees before the ikon and pray for a blessing on this match, as all respectable people should do," observed Miss Pereplitsin, who now saw that she must conform to existing circumstances and keep an eye open to the inevitable future.

All present hastened to follow this reasonable advice, and a clamour instantly arose. "We must place a new candle before the ikon," and up jumped Bachchéef on to a chair in order to fix a new candle before the image; but he promptly fell off and had to give his place to Miss Pereplitsin, who did the needful by the ikon, while all the old women present crossed themselves and bowed low before it. The image was then taken down and carried to Mrs. General; uncle and Nastia went on their knees once more, and the ceremony of betrothal was performed in due order, under the directions of Miss Pereplitsin, who continuously prompted the chief actors: "Now then, kneel! now put your lips to the ikon! now kiss your mother's hand!" and so on.

After the bride and bridegroom had kissed the ikon, old Bachchéef insisted on following their example; he then kissed Mrs. General's hand, as they had done. He was in a state of perfectly indescribable ecstasy.

"Hurrah!" he yelled again. "Now then, we'll have the champagne."

However, everyone was equally delighted now. Mrs. General wept tears of joy; this union, when blessed by Thomas, became both desirable and proper, even a sacred necessity, in her eyes; and, above all, Thomas would never leave her side again, that was clear.

My uncle divided his attention between kneeling before his mother and kissing her hands, and embracing me and Bachchéef, and Misinashikoff, and everyone else. He nearly suffocated poor Iliusha with his hugs. Sásha was busy kissing and hugging Nastia. Aunt Proskóvia cried, and Bachchéef comforted her. Old Edgevikin stood crying in a corner, too, and wiped his eyes with his dirty old check handkerchief. Gavril grinned in another corner, and Thialey sobbed louder than all the others together, and went round the room kissing everybody's hands. Everyone was quite overcome with tender feelings—no one had spoken a word as yet—it seemed as if there were nothing to say; the only audible sounds were joyful ejaculations. No one realised how this had all come about so suddenly. The only fact recognised by all was that Thomas had done it, and that this fact was the essence of the whole matter.

Within five minutes of this revelation of universal happiness Tatiana Ivanovna appeared among us. How on earth had she

had time to find out, sitting all alone upstairs as she was, that there was love and marriage and romance going on below? She came in radiant and with tears of joy, beautifully dressed, and flew to embrace Nastia with loud and inarticulate cries of delight.

“Nastia, Nastia, you loved him and I didn't know it!” she cried. “My goodness, they loved each other and suffered in secret—in mystery; and they were watched! What a delightful romance. Nastia, tell me honestly now, do you really love this silly fellow?”

Instead of replying verbally, Nastia embraced poor Tatiana and kissed her tenderly.

Tatiana clapped her hands with delight. “What a bewitching, romantic story it is,” she cried; “but listen, Nastia—believe me, darling, every one of these men is mean and indolent, and unworthy of our love. Perhaps he may be the best of them! Come here, you silly fellow, and let me look at your eyes; do you really mean to say you are in love? *Can* you love? do your eyes lie, now, or not? No, no, they don't lie; that is real love in them. Oh, Nastia, how happy I am. Look here, my beauty, you are not rich; let me give you thirty thousand or so. Do, now, I've got plenty; I don't want it. No, no,” she cried, seeing that Nastia was about to refuse; “no, no; and you be quiet, colonel, it's not your business. No, Nastia, I wish to make you this present, and I shall; don't offend me by refusing it. I shall cry if you do; no, no, don't.”

Tatiana was in such a state of ecstatic bliss that it was thought advisable to let her suppose the gift was accepted, for the present at all events. Tatiana rushed to kiss Mrs. General next, and then gave us each a turn. Bachchéef solemnly advanced and requested her hand.

“Forgive me,” he said, “for making a fool of myself in the carriage. I did not know what a heart of gold you have.”

“Silly fellow! I know you of old,” said Tatiana, with a charming, playful smile, and she caught old Bachchéef a pretty smart slap across the nose with her glove, skipping past him after this feat like a zephyr. The fat old gentleman backed out of her way very promptly.

“She's a most worthy woman,” he said to me, confidentially, looking at me with his old face beaming with delight.

"Thomas!" cried my uncle, at this moment; "you are the author of all our happiness; how shall I ever reward you?"

"Never mind me, colonel," said Thomas, faintly. "Continue to take no notice of me and you will be quite happy without me."

He was evidently piqued, for in the midst of the general happiness he had appeared to be more or less forgotten.

"It's only our ecstacy, Thomas," cried uncle; "I confess I am so happy, I don't know where I am. Listen, Thomas, I have offended you; but all my life and all my blood would not atone for the offence, and therefore, I am silent about it; but if at any time you wish to command my life, my head—anything—it is yours. I will say no more, Thomas." And uncle waved his hand, as though to show that no words could express more than what he had now said; but he looked at Thomas gratefully, and there were tears in his eyes.

"Yes, yes," added little Sásha; "and I did not know what a good man you were, Thomas; and I was rude to you also. So forgive me, too, Thomas, and be assured that I shall love you with all my heart for this; you don't know how I esteem you already."

"Yes, Thomas," added old Bachchéf, "you must forgive me too. I didn't know you. Why, you are not only a scholar, you are a hero. My whole house is yours. I tell you what; come over the day after to-morrow, and Mrs. General, and the bride and bridegroom and all—and, by Jove! you shall have a dinner. I won't boast beforehand, but I can tell you this, bird's milk is about the only thing I won't get for you. Word of honour!"

In the midst of all this, Nastia approached Thomas and without more ado, kissed him.

"Thomas Tomich," she said, "you are our benefactor, and I don't know how ever to repay you, but I can say one thing, I shall always be as a tender, loving sister to you—" She could not finish, tears choked her voice.

Thomas kissed her and burst into tears himself.

"My children," he said, "live and be happy, and in the moment of your joy think sometimes of the poor exile. I must hope that my own sorrow may chasten me to yet higher—must be my one consoling thought now."

"Why, where are you off to, Thomas?" cried uncle, in dire alarm.

All shuddered and drew near to hear Thomas's reply.

"How can I stay in your house after your late act, colonel?" asked Thomas with extraordinary dignity.

But he was not permitted to say another word, for the cries and howls of the assembled company, drowned his voice; they begged, they entreated, they argued, they cried. I don't know what they did not do; of course he never had the slightest intention of leaving the house, no more than on the day before, or on the occasion when he went out and dug the potatoes and turnips. He knew very well that now, especially, he would never be permitted to go, when he had just posed as the joy-bringer, when faith in himself had just been re-established on a firmer basis than ever, and when everyone in the place was ready to carry him shoulder high as the author of all the honour and happiness of the establishment.

But probably his rather humble home-coming of an hour ago, when he had run away from the thunder and lightning had created within him a sense of the need of some reactionary heroism on his part; and besides this, here was such a grand chance for a little swagger and posturing that he really could not resist it.

So Mr. Thomas struggled and insisted, and withstood, and argued, and would not hear of staying in the house, where, he said, he was only bullied and kept down. He pointed out that he had but returned in order to bring about the general happiness; no, he must have his freedom, he could not live in the Home of Ingratitude, and eat broth and crusts seasoned with blows.

However, he paused at last, and was pushed back into his arm-chair; but his eloquence was by no means exhausted yet.

"Have I not been ill-treated here?" he yelled, "have not I suffered the assault of bitter tongues? Haven't you yourself, colonel, laughed at me, and chaffed at me, like any ignorant little street boy in the town? Yes, colonel, for if you did not actually shout and put out your tongue at me physically, you did so morally, and that is still more offensive. I do not at present speak of the blows you—"

"Thomas, Thomas, don't kill me with these reminiscences," cried uncle. "I have told you already that all my blood would be insufficient to wash out that offence of mine against you. Be great, Thomas! forgive and forget, and stay to witness our happiness—your own fruit, you know, Thomas!"

"Well," said Thomas, "well—embrace me, my children—I shall stay."

"He is going to stay," shouted one and all, in an ecstasy of delight.

"Yes, I stay and forgive you all! Colonel, let Thalaley have a bit of sugar—he mustn't be allowed to cry on such a day of happiness as this."

Uncle rushed to the sugar basin, which Aunt Proskovia had, instantly produced from somewhere or other, and extracted two or three lumps, which he promptly dropped; then seeing that his bungling fingers were good for nothing just now, he took the whole basin and emptied it into Thalaley's hands.

"There," he said, "on such a day as this, Thalaley—you shall have the whole thing."

At this moment the door opened, and Vidoplassoff announced the arrival of Mr. Koroskin.

"Koroskin," said uncle, "dear me, of course I—I shall be glad to see him; but don't you think, Thomas, at such a moment, it would be as well to say we don't receive?"

"No, no, not at all," said Thomas, amiably; "have him up by all means, and let him have a share in the universal happiness." Thomas Tomich's mood was little less than angelic. But Vidoplassoff announced with some confusion, but with great elegance of expression, that Mr. Koroskin was not quite himself this morning; was, in fact, suffering from alcoholic poisoning; or, in short, was drunk.

Mrs. General immediately put on an expression of offended dignity; poor uncle looked sincerely pained and sorry for Koroskin; Misinchikoff left the room to show the sufferer to a bedroom and recommend him to sleep his malady off.

All the company remained silent; but at length Thomas smiled, then chuckled, and little by little went through the scale of mirth till his laughter was loud and long. Mrs. General joined in, so did all the rest; while poor uncle stood bewildered and shocked, blushing deep red, and perfectly unable to say a word for vexation.

"Goodness gracious!" he said at last, "whoever would have thought it? but—it's a thing that might happen to anyone, of course. Thomas, I assure you this is one of the most honourable, noblest, and best read men in the world—he really is, Thomas; you shall see for yourself."

"I see it already," cried Thomas, panting with laughter;

"he must be learned—very learned indeed—*full* of learning, in fact, and of something else, too."

"Oh, but you should hear him talk about science," murmured old Edgevikin.

"Thomas," uncle began again, but the general laughter drowned his voice. Tears were flowing from Thomas's eyes; and at last, seeing everyone else laughing, uncle joined in himself.

"Well, well," he said, "it doesn't matter. You have a large heart, Thomas; you have made me happy, and you'll forgive Korofkin this little slip too."

Nastia alone was silent, and took no share in the general mirth. With her eyes full of love, she gazed at her good colonel, and seemed as though she would say:

"What a dear, good, splendid, noble, generous man you are, and oh, how I love you!"

VI.

CONCLUSION.

THOMAS's triumph was complete. It is certain that without his help the matter would never have been arranged, and the accomplished fact did away with and annihilated all suspicions and objections. Uncle and Nastia would not listen to me when I ventured to hint that the circumstances under which Thomas's consent was secured were not quite above criticism. Sasha was angry with me for my hard-heartedness. She was going to work a cushion for "kind, good Thomas." Bachchéef would have strangled me now if I had dared to say a word against Thomas. He followed the latter about like a dog, and continually ejaculated: "What a splendid fellow you are, Thomas!" As for old Edgevikin, he was wild with joy at this time. He had long observed that his daughter had fallen in love with uncle, and he with her; and his dreams night and day had been of how to bring about a marriage.

Of course, Thomas would never leave the house now, and of course there would be no end to his tyranny.

On the very day of the betrothal, when Thomas was just dressed and seated waiting for the dinner-bell, it struck him to send for the whole family, and then and there preached at uncle and Nastia on the duties and responsibilities of wedded life, while the hungry audience had to wait for their food.

At dinner, Thomas was in very great form. He drank more than usual, and proposed toasts of every conceivable kind—not very delicate some of them ; but when Nastia jumped up and left the room, Thomas was not offended, but spoke feelingly of Nastia's lady-like dignity and goodness, which carried uncle into the seventh heaven of delight.

After dinner uncle disappeared with Nastia—they had hardly spoken a word to each other since the betrothal, and had seemed to avoid looking at one another—and Thomas and the other men sat over their cups of coffee. I stayed with them to listen to the conversation.

"Why is it," cried Thomas, "that I am prepared to be burned alive for my convictions, and that none of you are? Why is it?"

"But what would be the use of it, Thomas?" said old Edgevikin, "you'd be burnt up, and there's an end of it ; and besides, it would hurt so."

"An end of it? no, sir, the glorious urn remains,—but how are you to understand and appreciate me? In your eyes there are no great men, excepting your Cœsars and your Alexanders of Macedon! And what have your Cœsars ever done? Did they make any one happy? What did your boasted Alexander of Macedon do? Pooh! give me a phalanx like his, and I'll conquer the world, or you, or he, or any one else would do so. It's all bosh! He ought to have been well whipped instead of made much of all the world over!—and Cœsar the same!"

"Oh, spare Cœsar, Thomas, at least."

"Why should I spare the fool?"

"No, don't spare him!" cried Bachchœf, who was also a little elated with the excitement of the dinner ; "why should the fool be spared? They're only a set of jumping acrobats, these fellows. They all twiddle about on one leg, and are tarred with the same brush. Don't spare them, they are all a set of muffs and blackguards—you are the only man worth tuppence among the lot, Thomas, and the best scholar of the whole tribe besides."

Bachchœf, whenever he did yield, made a complete present of himself, without reserve, and unconditionally.

I found uncle, later on, in the garden. He was in the old place by the pond, with Nastia. When I appeared she darted away, as though she were guilty ; but uncle came to meet me ; there were tears of real joy in his eyes, and he pressed my hands hard.

"My dear old fellow," he said, "I can't believe it all—nor can Nastia. All we can do is *wonder*, and give thanks to the Almighty. She has been crying—and I, well I just go on puzzling and puzzling, and trying to believe in my happiness, and wondering *why* I am to be so happy. What have I done, how have I deserved it ?"

"If any one deserves happiness, uncle it is yourself," I said, with conviction, "for I have never seen such another generous, kind, and noble-hearted man as you are."

"No, no, Sergey, that's a little too strong," he said ; "and the worst of it is that men like myself (I only speak *for* myself, of course) are only kind and good to others when things are going well with ourselves ; when things go badly, you can't come near us. We have just been talking this over, Nastia and I, and do you know, noble fellow as Thomas is, I have never thoroughly believed in him until to-day, although I assured you that I did ; even yesterday, when he refused that money, I did not believe in him ; to my own shame be it spoken, mind. I can tell you my very heart bleeds when I think of what I did to-day—but I was not master of myself. When he said that about Nastia, you know, it was as though something gnawed at my heart ; I did not know what I was doing, and became a sort of tiger—"

"Why, uncle, it is but natural !"

"No, no, my dear fellow ; the simple fact is that I am a moody and passionate egotist, and that without firm control I surrender myself to my passion. So Thomas says, and what else can one say ? And if you only knew, Sergey, how often and often I have been unjust and unkind and pitiless, not only to Thomas, but to many others besides ; and now all this comes home to me so, and I can't help feeling that I have done nothing to deserve my happiness. Nastia says she feels the same ; but I cannot imagine what sins or faults she can have been guilty of, for she is more an angel than a human being. She says we are in terrible debt to God, and that we must try to be better and kinder than we were before, in order to pay it off in some measure. I wish you could have heard her speak,

Sergey, she was so earnest and spoke so prettily. Oh ! Sergey, there never was such another girl as she is ! ”

He paused, intensely agitated, but recommenced a moment later. “ We have determined to indulge mother and Thomas, and Tatiana Ivanovna especially. How badly I have treated Tatiana, and you, too, by the way, old fellow ; but if anybody offends that dear good old thing now, when I am ‘ by ! —by Jove, I’ll —but never mind that now ; we must do something for Misinchikoff too. ”

“ Yes, uncle,” I said, “ I have quite altered my opinion of Tatiana ; it is impossible not to esteem and sympathize with her. ”

“ Of course, of course,” he assented warmly. “ Then there’s Koroskin, poor fellow. I daresay you are laughing at him, and think very poorly of him for coming in here drunk ; but believe me, it is misfortune. The man is a most refined, scholarly fellow, but he has seen trouble,” and uncle launched off into a dissertation as to how in the lowest forms of human degradation, there often lurk the highest and noblest sentiments of humanity ; that we should never despise the fallen ; that the scale we use for the weighing of goodness and morality are wrong, etc., etc.—in fact, uncle worked himself into a state of transport.

“ My dear fellow,” he said, “ I am sure you understand me, and would express what I have said much better yourself. Why is man ever wicked ? why does wickedness exist when virtue is so much nobler, and even pleasanter ? Nastia thinks the same. Oh ! Sergey, what a lovely place this is ! just look at the view, look at the leaves and growth around us, how beautiful everything is after the thunder storm,— so fresh and sweet ! I suppose the poor people feel this sort of thing, ar I enjoy life, don’t you think so ? ”

“ Certainly, uncle, in their own way, they do. ”

“ Yes, of course. You must remember that old place quite well, Sergey, don’t you ? how you used to play and run about here when you were little ? ” Uncle looked at me with an expression of ineffable love and happiness. “ How well I remember you as a boy,” he went on ; “ you weren’t allowed to go to the pond alone, I remember ; and just now I recall a picture —my dead Katia and you and I—in this very place ; I was sitting in the corner of the summer-house smoking a pipe, and she was stroking your hair just here, and she said, ‘ it was

right to take the little orphan in, do you remember that, Sergey?"

"Just a little, uncle."

"It was evening and the setting sun shone down on both of you, and I sat and watched you, I still drive over to her grave every month, old boy," he added, and his voice trembled a little as he spoke. "I have just been talking to Nastia about it and she says that now she will go with me—"

Uncle paused, trying his best to keep down his agitation. At this moment Vidoplassoff came up to us.

"Hallo, Vidoplassoff—do you come from Thomas Tomich?" cried uncle, in some surprise.

"Well, no, sir, it's more on my own account," said the man.

"Surely it's not about your name again?" asked uncle, terrified.

"Very sorry, sir, but I can't help it, I'm insulted every day."

"Oh, Vidoplassoff, what a man you are! What sort of insults?"

"Why, it's all through Matrecona, sir; I can't pass anybody, but immediately I am shouted and laughed at—e'en by dirty little boys and girls. I have no peace of life, sir; and I appeal to you to save me with your protection."

"Very well, very well, I give you my word I will see to it—there! Now then, how is Mr. Korofkin—asleep?"

"No, sir, he's gone away."

"How, gone away; you don't mean to say you allowed him to go?"

"I had to, sir; when he awoke and remembered the facts and circumstances of his arrival, he beat his forehead with his hand and tore his hair, and his lamentations were most piteous; he said he could never show himself before the ladies again, sir, and so he had the horses put to and drove away."

"It showed great delicacy of feeling," said my uncle, with emotion, "but what's to be done, Sergey, shall we send after him, do you think?"

"No, uncle, I don't think so."

"Well, perhaps better not, but you see, Sergey—of course I'm no philosopher—but don't you see at every turn that there is much more good in every human being than shows at first sight. Look at Korofkin now, poor fellow, he could not bear the shame.— Well, come along, let's go to Thomas—we

are staying here too long, he may be offended and think us ungrateful and inattentive—come along. Poor Korofskin, eh?"

My novel is done. The lovers are united, and the good genius has taken up his quarters permanently in the house, in the shape of Thomas Tomich. I might make all sorts of elegant observations on this point, but I don't think they are wanted—that's my opinion, at all events, and in place of such observations, I will merely add a few words as to the subsequent lives of each of the heroes of this book. No orthodox novel ever ends without these last words; they are, as it were, part of the conditions of novel writing.

The wedding of the happy couple took place six weeks after the events which I have related. It was merely a family affair, without any great pomp and not many guests. I was best man for Nastia, and Misinchikoff performed the same office for uncle, but there were other guests. Of course the greatest of the guests upon the occasion was the mighty Thomas Tomich; he was petted and fondled by all. But, unfortunately, once, as the champagne was being carried round, the tray was not presented to Thomas, and instantly the storm fell. Thomas rushed to his room and shut himself up. Lamentations and reproaches commenced from inside the door; he was despised and hated, and these new arrivals in the household had been allowed to usurp the love and attention which were his ~~by~~ right, and he was now no more than a useless log of wood in the house, and had better be thrown out! Uncle was in despair; Nastia cried, and Mrs. General, as usual, had a fit or swooned.

This sort of thing went on in uncle and Nastia's house for exactly seven years, in fact, until Thomas died (last year). He would sulk and storm and fume and rage and scold, but never did the respect of the couple, whom he had made happy, wane or diminish towards him; in fact, it seemed to grow greater in proportion as Thomas's caprice increased. The colonel and Nastia were so happy together that they were at times quite fearful for ~~the~~ their happiness; they felt that it was too much and that they might have to bear the cross of suffering afterwards to repair the balance. Of course Thomas could

do exactly what he pleased in such a household as this, and my goodness! he did not stay his hand during those seven years.

Three years after the wedding Mrs. General expired. Poor Thomas was thrown into a state of utter despair by this event. Ever to this date they speak of Thomas's then condition of mind with bated breath. At the funeral, while her grave was being filled in, he jumped into it and begged to be covered in with her. And for a whole month he was deprived of all knives and forks for fear of disaster. On one occasion he was prevented with the greatest difficulty—it took four of us to accomplish it—from swallowing a large pin which he had got into his mouth.

One of the spectators of this last struggle was bold enough to say that he could easily have swallowed the pin dozens of times over during the said struggle; but the heretic was at once put down with much show of wrath, by the others, and sent to Coventry. On that occasion only Nastia kept silence, and very nearly laughed, but uncle looked at her with so much confusion and anxiety that she restrained herself.

I must add, however, that though Thomas was as personally capricious and peccary as ever in the house, yet those old despotic and impudent ratings of my uncle on every occasion did not now exist. Thomas might scold and reproach and cry and complain and make a fool of himself as much as he liked; but there was no more abuse of uncle, no more scenes like the historical one of "Your excellency," which I have described; and the change was due, I think, to Nastia.

She would not see her husband humiliated, and she could always get Thomas to make some concession or to submit, in case of need, and Thomas saw clearly enough that she understood him, or nearly understood him, for Nastia decidedly indulged Thomas, and invariably confirmed her husband in his enthusiastic eulogies of the great man. She wished that others should esteem everything that her husband did or said, and, therefore, she publicly justified his attachment to Thomas on every occasion.

But I am sure that Nastia's heart of gold has long since forgotten all its former wrongs. When Thomas took her hand and united her to my uncle, she forgave him all the past; and besides, I believe she thoroughly entered into my uncle's opinion that it was not right to ask too much of a man who

had seen so much suffering and ill treatment as Thomas had in earlier life. For poor Nastia had herself been one of that class to whom humiliation is part of the air they breathe—and she herself had suffered, and remembered it.

A month after Mrs. General's death, Thomas calmed down ; he became gentle and even caressing in his manners ; but he now developed a new and most unexpected style of fits ; he took to falling into a kind of magnetic dream which alarmed any spectators of it in the highest degree. For instance, the sufferer might be laughing or talking, and all of a sudden would as it were petrify as he stood, and petrify too in the exact position in which he happened to be before the attack. If he had happened to be laughing, he would remain with the smile on his lips ; if he happened to have a fork in his hand, in mid-journey to his mouth, so it would remain. And Thomas would rest thus unconscious and immovable for an hour at a time, after which he would awake and state that he remembered nothing whatever.

On one occasion Thomas, in a fit of irritation, cursed uncle for his "hourly insults," to himself and went off to live with old Bachchéef. The latter received him enthusiastically and took his part so seriously that he quarrelled with uncle, and immediately ordered horses and drove over to the town in order to file a legal protest against uncle's claim to a certain piece of land (which uncle had never claimed at all), however, when he came home again, he found Thomas flown, he had forgiven uncle and returned to Stepánchikoff. The rage of Bachchéef was terrible, but he turned up at Stepánchikoff three days later, begged pardon all round, and recommenced following Thomas about like a dog, with occasional exclamations of "you're a splendid fellow, Thomas ; you're a real scholar, Thomas !" as of old.

Well, Thomas Tomich lies in his grave now, side by side with Mrs. General. He has a noble gravestone over him of white marble, covered with mourning quotations and laudatory inscriptions. Occasionally the colonel and his wife visit the tomb of Thomas. To this day they cannot speak of him without a special feeling ; they always recall his words, his tastes, his likes and dislikes ; and his possessions are all preserved as priceless relics.

Nastia and my uncle have grown more and more attached to one another as time goes by. Heaven has not blessed them

with children, which is a source of great grief to them ; but they never complain. Sásha has been married some time now, to a fine young fellow of the neighbourhood. Iliusha is studying at Moscow, so that now uncle and Nastia have it all to themselves ; but they never have enough of each other, and their solicitude the one for the other approaches the ridiculous. Nastia is always praying. I think if one of the two died before the other, the survivor would not last more than a week at the most ; but I hope they may live long—both of them—worthy souls !

They receive all comers with equal welcome and are delighted to share all they have, at any moment, with those who are less fortunate. Nastia loves to read the lives of saints ; and she tells her friends that in her opinion the right thing for rich people to do, is to give their all to the poor, and find real happiness in their own subsequent poverty. Were it not for Sásha and Iliusha, uncle would long ago have acted up to this doctrine.

My Aunt Proskóvia lives contentedly with them, and does the housekeeping for them. Old Bachchéef made her an offer of marriage soon after uncle's wedding, but she flatly refused to have anything to do with him. After this we all supposed that she had convent life in view ; but this was not the case. It is Aunt Proskóvia's nature to extinguish herself for those she loves ; she likes nothing better than to be a nonentity except as regards serving and fussing after some one else ; and her mother Mrs. General being now dead, she has turned her attention to watching over uncle and Nastia.

Old Edgevikin is alive, and his visits to his daughter are more and more frequent as years go by. At first he would not come near the place, nor would he allow any of his family to do so. He was proud and suspicious, and could not bear to think that he would be received by his rich relations out of charity. Nor would he take a copeak from uncle to help support his large family ; what little assistance he accepted was exclusively from Nastia's private purse. Nastia had made a great mistake when she told me that day in the garden that her father used to come and act the clown for her sake. He never did anything of the kind. His fooling was merely a sort of safety valve for his accumulated spleen. The need of jesting and sarcastic use of his tongue was engrained in his blood. His children were all well placed, now, in various

educational establishments in Moscow; and this had been arranged with the greatest difficulty by Nastia, and only by the clearest proof that the cost fell upon her personally, and came out of the thirty thousand roubles given to her by Tatiana Ivanovna.

* These thirty thousand roubles were never actually accepted during Tatiana's lifetime; but in order to pacify the latter, large loans had been accepted from her on two occasions, and when she died, three years after the wedding, Nastia got her thirty thousand after all.

Tatiana's death was a very sudden one. The family were all assembled dressed for a ball to which they were invited by a family in the neighbourhood. Tatiana was invited also, and had just put on her pretty ball dress, and was fixing a wreath of white roses on her head, when she suddenly felt faint, sat down,—and died. She was buried in the white wreath. Nastia was much affected by her death; she and all the household had petted Tatiana and fondled her, for years, like a little child.

The good sense of Tatiana's will surprised everyone. Excepting Nastia's thirty thousand roubles, she left her whole property, about three hundred thousand roubles, for the education of orphan girls, and for their assistance on leaving school.

The Pereplitsin married a small government clerk, and has transferred her vile temper and nagging manners to his establishment, which is the village to which Tatiana cloped on a certain occasion. She quarrels with her husband and pulls his children's hair; she scratches his face and continually fires her exalted rank, as a major's daughter, at him.

Misinchikoff is on his feet again. He very sensibly threw up his designs on Tatiana and took to studying the art of farming. Very soon my uncle was able to recommend him as steward to a certain count, a landowner of three thousand souls in the neighbourhood, who rarely visits his estates.

The count, acting on uncle's recommendation, turned off his German steward (who, in spite of the vaunted German honesty, had cheated him abominably), and offered the place to our friend Misinchikoff. An extraordinary change came over the property; the peasants all prospered, the estate improved, the profits doubled; and in five years it was impossible to recognise the place! What must have been the surprise and sorrow of the count when, five years after he had entered his

service, the successful steward, in spite of all persuasions and entreaties, insisted upon retiring ! And what was the astonishment of all around when, two months later, Misinchikoff reappeared in the character of landowner, with a nice little property of a hundred souls, thirty miles away from the count's estate, and purchased by him from an old brother officer of the hussars. Next year he had sixty more souls of his own, and now his property is matchless. The world wonders where he can have got the money from, and some only shake their heads ; but Misinchikoff is perfectly composed and his conscience appears to be entirely at rest. He has his sister living with him—the same who gave him her last three roubles when he left Moscow. She is a lady of good manners, not exactly young, but very charming. She keeps house for him and considers his will her law. She is very popular at Stepánchikoff, and Bachchées is said to be far gone in love with her, he would like to make her an offer but fears a refusal. However, I hope to have more to say about Mr. Bachchées another time, that is, in another history.

There—that's all, I think, about everybody. No, wait ! Gavil has grown very old and has quite forgotten his French Thialley developed into a capital coachman. As for poor Vidoplassoff, he found his way into a lunatic asylum years ago, and I think he died there—I'm not sure ; however, I'm going down to Stepánchikoff in a day or two, and I'll ask uncle about him.

END OF THE FRIEND OF THE FAMILY

THE GAMBLER.

CHAPTER I.

AT last, I have returned, after my fortnight's absence. Our people have been here, in Rouleettcnberg, three days. I thought they would be waiting for me most impatiently, but I was quite wrong, for the general looked as though he didn't care a fig about anything, spoke to me condescendingly, and sent me off to his sister. It was evident they had got hold of money somewhere or other. The general—I could not help thinking—was looking a little ashamed of himself. Maria Philipovna was in a decidedly fussy mood, and didn't take much notice of me; however, she took the money I brought and counted it, and then listened to my report. Merventoff and the Frenchman and some Englishman or other were expected to dinner—real Moscow fashion that! If you can get hold of a little money, give a dinner at once.

Paulina, as soon as she saw me, asked me why I had been away so long; but she went off somewhere before I answered her question. Of course, she did this on purpose. I must have it all out with her—I really must; there is such an accumulation of offences waiting for explanation.

I was shown to a small room in the fourth storcy of the hotel. Everybody here is aware that I belong to the general's suite. He has evidently lost no time about letting people know what his title is; and in this place they seem to think a general must be a rich and mighty Russian grandee.

Before dinner, the general found occasion to give me three notes, of a thousand francs each. I was to change them at the hotel office. I did so; and now, of course, we shall be able to keep up the character of millionaires for at least a week.

I wanted to take the children out for a walk, but the general called me back from the landing and thought fit to ask me where I was taking them to.

This individual cannot look me straight in the face. He tries to do it, but I always give him such an intent stare back again—that is, a disrespectful stare—that he becomes confused at once.

Well, in most pompous parlance—piling phrase on phrase until he had utterly lost himself in words—the general gave me to understand that I must take the children to the park, as far as possible from the "Vauxhall." At last he seemed to lose his temper, and added, brusquely :

"Or you'll be taking them into the 'Vauxhall,' and up to the roulette table. You'll excuse me for saying so, but I know you are rather of a giddy disposition, and very likely you will be tempted to play. At all events, though I am not your master, and have no ambition to act as such, yet I have the right to express a hope that at least you will not compromise *me*."

"Why, I haven't any money," I replied, calmly; "and in order to lose some I must first have it to lose."

"You shall have your money at once," he said, blushing; and he went to his desk, looked up his account book, and told me that there was a hundred and twenty roubles owing to me.

"How are we to settle it?" he said. "We must calculate what a hundred and twenty roubles is in thalers. Here, you'd better take a hundred thalers; if it's more, you sha'n't lose it, of course."

I took the money without a word.

"You mustn't be offended with what I have said. I know you do take offence very easily. My remarks were merely by way of friendly warning. Of course, I have no right to offer more than that."

Returning home with the children before dinner, I met a whole cavalcade of people. It appeared that our folk had been to see some ruins not far off. There were two handsome carriages with beautiful horses. Miss Blanche was in one of them, with Maria Philipovna and Paulina; and the general with the Frenchman and the Englishman, were on horseback. The party looked very well, and passers-by all stopped to stare at them.

I calculated that, with the four thousand francs which I had brought with me, and the three thousand which the general had

scraped up somewhere or other, he must have some seven or eight thousand francs to go on with ; no, this wouldn't be enough for Miss Blanche !

Miss Blanche is staying at our hotel with her mother, so is this Frenchman. The waiters call him "count ;" they call Miss Blanche's mother "countess." Goodness knows whether either of these individuals really is count or countess ; they may be for all I know.

I knew very well that the count would not notice me when I came to dinner. Of course the general would never have thought of introducing me, even if the count had not known beforehand (he having been in Russia) what a very small bird an "ouchitel" (or teacher) is. However, in point of fact, the count knows me very well indeed.

But, to say the truth, I came to dinner as a sort of uninvited guest to-day ; for I am pretty certain the general forgot to make his arrangements beforehand, or I should undoubtedly have been derogated to the table d'hôte. The general received me with doubtful welcome when I came in ; but kind Maria Philipovna made room for me at once, and my meeting with Mr. Astley, the Englishman, was a redeeming feature in the business ; so I took my place as though I naturally belonged to it.

I had first met this strange Briton in a railway carriage. We had sat opposite to one another, while I was following my party through Prussia ; next, I knocked up against him in France, then in Switzerland ; I had seen him twice during the last fortnight, and here he was again, at Roulettenberg. I never in my life saw anyone so shy as he is ; he is stupidly shy, and must know it, too, for he is not by any means a fool. At the same time he is a remarkably pleasant and quiet man ; we had conversed at our first meeting in Prussia, and he told me that he had just been to the North Cape, and hoped to attend the Nijni fair later on.

I don't know how he made acquaintance with the general ; but he seems to me to be desperately in love with L'aulina. When she entered the room he blushed up like a sunrise. He seemed delighted to find me sitting next to him at dinner, and appears to consider me his bosom friend.

The Frenchman swaggered greatly at dinner ; he was off-hand, and on the high horse with all the company. At Moscow, I remember, he used to be very different ; there he was all soap

and honey. He talked a great deal on this occasion about finance and Russian policy, and so on; and the general was bold enough to disagree with him once or twice, but always very mildly, and with great care to avoid wounding the count's feelings of superiority. I, myself, was in a very strange condition of mind. As usual, before dinner was half over, I had found occasion to ask myself the inevitable question, "Why do I dally here with this old general? Why haven't I left him long ago?" Occasionally I glanced at Paulina, but she did not observe me; and I ended by losing my temper, and determining to be rude.

So I began by loudly, and without the slightest excuse, elbowing myself into somebody else's conversation. I wished, above all things, to have a row with the Frenchman.

I turned to the general, and loudly and arbitrarily (I think I interrupted him in the middle of a sentence) stated that this season we Russians simply could not dine at any table d'hôte in Europe!

The general gave me a look of surprise.

"If one happens to be a man of any self-respect," I continued, "one is bound to be drawn into a quarrel and is sure to have one's nose tweaked. In Paris and on the Rhine, and even in Switzerland there are such swarms of Poles and of little sympathising Frenchmen, that it is quite impossible to get a word in, if you happen to be a Russian."

I said this in French. The general stared at me in bewilderment, uncertain whether to be angry or only to show me how astonished he was that I should have so far forgotten myself.

"I suppose we are to understand that somebody somewhere, has been giving you a lesson?" said the Frenchman, with an air of contemptuous indifference.

"Well," I said, "I had a row in Paris, first with a Pole and then with a French officer who took his part. Afterwards a lot of Frenchmen came over to my camp where I told them how I had threatened to spit into the coffee of a certain non-negligent."

"To spit?" said the general, staring at me in polite amazement. The Frenchman gave me a look of incredulity.

"Yes," I said, "spit. There were a couple of days when I thought I should have to go to Rome about our business, so I went to the Pope's Embassy in Paris to have my passport

Some little parson fellow received me, and listened politely but drily to what I had to say, and then asked me to wait. Though I was in a great hurry I sat down to wait, of course, and pulled the *Opinion Nationale* out of my pocket, and commenced to read some of the vilest slander of Russia that can be found. Meanwhile I heard that somebody else had passed through the next room and had been shown into monsignor's presence. I observed how my little friend had bowed and scraped before this new arrival. Well, I asked him again whether I could see monsignor about my pass; and again he requested me, still more drily, to wait. A little while after some other stranger came in—some Australian fellow—stated his business, and was shown up at once.

"Then I lost my temper. I approached my little abbé friend and told him that as monsignor was evidently receiving other people, he might just as well settle my business too. The abbé started back in pained surprise. He could not understand how a wretched Russian like myself could presume to put himself on a level with the guests of monsignor. In the most impudent tone of voice—as though delighted to be able to insult me, and looking me over, haughtily, from head to foot, he cried, 'You don't surely suppose that monsignor is going to forego his coffee in order to see you?' So I called out (a good deal louder than he had shouted, too)—'Then, let me tell you, I shall go and spit in your monsignor's coffee! If you don't finish with my passport this minute, I shall go up to monsignor by myself.'

"'What! now, when he is sitting there with a cardinal?' cried the little fellow, backing from me in horror, and with that he rushed to the door, placed his back against it, crossed his hands on his bosom and gave me to understand that he would rather perish than let me pass.

"Then I told him that I was a heretic and a barbarian, and that all these archbishops and cardinals and monsignors, were humbugs in my opinion,—in a word I showed him that I had no intention of caving in. So he looked at me with everlasting hatred in his eyes, snatched my passport out of my hand and took it upstairs. "In another minute it was all ready and *mise*. There it is, if you'd like to see it," and I took out my passport and showed the Roman stamp on it.

"Well, you—" began the general,

"Your self-condemnation as a heretic and barbarian saved you," said the Frenchman. "*Cela n'était pas si bête!*"

"What, is that the way you look at us Russians? Why our people very often sit here and daren't utter a sound for fear of letting out the fact that they are Russians. At ~~an~~ events in my hotel in Paris they were all far more attentive to me after I had told them of my row with the abbé. There was a fat Polish noble at the table who had been very combative towards me before, who quite came down a peg after that. And the Frenchmen who were present even tolerated my statement that I had seen a Russian, a year or two before, at whom a French chasseur had shot during the campaign of 1812, merely for the sake of discharging his gun. The man in question had been a ten-year-old child at the time, and had not been able to get out of Moscow, he and his family."

"That's quite impossible," ejaculated the Frenchman, boiling over at once; "a French soldier could never have fired at a child."

"Meanwhile the fact remains," I replied, "for the story was told me by an honourable retired Russian officer, and I, myself, saw the scar of the French bullet on his cheek."

The Frenchman began to talk fast and furiously, and the general confirmed all he said; but I recommended him to read a little of General Perofsky's Notes, a man who was prisoner with the French in 1812. At last Maria Philipovna said something or other to change the conversation—for the general was much displeased with me, as the Frenchman and I had now begun to shout rather loudly at one another. Mr. Astley, however, was evidently delighted to see me quarrel with the Frenchman, and as we rose from the table he begged me to take a glass of wine with him.

In the evening I had an opportunity of talking to Paulina for a quarter of an hour while we strolled in the park. Paulina and I allowed the children to play about near the fountains, while we sat down on a bench near and talked, all alone.

We began about business of course. Paulina was seriously angry when I handed her only seven hundred guldens; she had fully believed that I should bring her at least two thousand guldens from Paris (where I had pawned her diamonds for her), if not more.

"I *must* have money," she said, "and unless I get hold of it somehow or other, I am lost."

I began questioning her as to what had happened during my absence.

"Nothing," she said, "except that we have had two pieces of news from St. Petersburg; the first that grandmother was very ill, and the second that she was supposed to be dead; this news came from Timofey Petrovitch, and we are now expecting confirmation."

"So that you are still living on hope, all of you?" I asked.

"Of course, why, for the last half year, we have only existed on this one hope."

"And do *you* hope it too?"

"Why not? She is no relation of mine. I am only the general's stepdaughter. But I know for a fact that granny has remembered me in her will."

"I should think that you will come in for a good deal there," I said.

"Yes, she was very fond of me; but why do *you* think so?"

I answered with another question.

"Tell me, is this count of ours acquainted with all the family secrets?"

"And pray, why are *you* interested in that particular question?" asked Paulina, looking coldly at me.

"Well, naturally, I am; I think the general has found occasion to borrow of him already, hasn't he?"

"You guess very accurately."

"And do you suppose he would have lent the money if he had not known all about granny? Did not you notice at dinner how, three times, he referred to your grandmother—calling her 'granny?' How short but how delightfully familiar an acquaintance!"

"You are right; so soon as he knows for certain that I have inherited money from granny, he will propose for my hand; is that what you want to find out?"

"I like that, 'will propose,' indeed, as if he had not done that long ago."

"You know very well that he has not," said Paulina warmly.

"Where did you meet that Englishman?" she asked, after a minute or two of silence.

"I knew you would ask me about him before long," I said, and then told her of my various meetings with Mr. Astley, in the train, and so on.

"He is very reserved, and I think he is in love," I added, "and if in love, then of course with you?"

"Yes, he is in love with me," said Paulina.

"And, of course, he is ten times as rich as the Frenchman. Has the Frenchman anything in reality? isn't there a good deal of doubt as to the actual existence of his possessions?"

"No, no doubt at all. He has a chateau somewhere; the general told me that for certain, only yesterday. There, isn't that enough for you?"

"In your place I should certainly marry the Englishman."

"Why?"

"The Frenchman is handsomer, but he is a much greater rascal; while the Englishman, besides being an honest man, is ten times as rich," I replied.

"Yes, but the Frenchman is a nobleman, and much cleverer," she said, with the greatest composure.

"Is that a fact though?"

"Certainly."

Paulina did not like my questions at all, and I could see that she wished to make me angry with the tone of her replies. I told her so.

"Well, I confess I do like to see you fly into a passion," she said. "Surely you ought to be made to pay the penalty for permission to cross-examine and question me as you do?"

"I consider I have a right to question you as much as ever I please," I said, "because I don't care what price I pay for the privilege. My life itself is perfectly valueless to me, now."

Paulina laughed.

"You told me that last time, on the Schlangenberg, that you were ready, at a word from me, to pitch yourself off the precipice, head first, a little matter of a thousand feet or so. Well, some day I shall call upon you to make good your words, just to see what you will do. You may be sure I shall not be afraid. You are hateful to me chiefly for the reason that I have allowed you too much freedom; but still more so, because I need you. However, I must take care of you more or less so long as I require you."

She moved as if she would rise; she had spoken with great show of irritation. Of late our conversations always finished with malice and temper, real malice.

"May I ask you, who this Miss Blanche is?" I asked, unwilling

to let her go before I had got all the information I wanted out of her.

"You know very well who Miss Blanche is ! there is nothing new about her. Of course she will marry the general, if the report about granny is true, that is, both she and her mother, and her third cousin, the Frenchman, all know quite well that we are ruined."

"And is the general very much in love?"

"Oh, never mind about that now, listen and don't forget what I say. Take these seven hundred guilders and go to the roulette-board, win as much as ever you can for me ; I *must* have money just now, at any cost."

So saying she called the children and went into the Vauxhall, where she joined the rest of our party.

As for me, I turned aside into the first path to the left, and walked about thoughtful and wonderin. The order to go to the roulette-table seemed to strike me with the effect of a shot in the head. It was a very strange thing. I had lots to think of and yet my thoughts would run to an analysis of my feelings towards Paulina. I certainly had felt more comfortable during my fortnight's absence, than on this, the day of my return. Yet it was equally certain that on my journey I had longed for her, madly, and panted, and half stifled my ch with yearning, and even when asleep I had dreamed of nothin, but her. Once, it was in Switzerland, I had fallen asleep in the carriage and I conversed aloud with Paulina in my sleep, to the great amusement of all my fellow passengers.

And now once more I put the question to myself, "Do I love her?" And again I could not answer the question, or rather, to say the truth, for the hundredth time I answered it by telling myself that I hated her.

And so I did hate her, at least she was hateful to me at times ! There were moments, especially at the finish of each of our conversations, when I would give half of my lifetime to strangle her. I swear that if it had been possible to plunge a sharp knife into her breast, I believe I should have done it with the greatest satisfaction.

And yet, I vow by all that I hold most solemn, that if on the Schlangenberg, at the fashionable "Point," she really were to say to me, "dash yourself off from here," I should do it at once and with a sense of absolute satisfaction too. I know I should !

This question must be settled one way or the other. She

understands all this wonderfully well ; and the thought that I fully and thoroughly recognise her inaccessibility and the utter hopelessness of the ultimate realization of my wild longings for her—this thought, I am quite sure, is a source of the greatest possible pleasure to her ; otherwise, could she, the careful and intelligent girl that she is, allow herself to live upon this footing of familiarity and intimacy with me ? I think she has looked upon me, up till now, with much the same feeling as prompted a certain empress of old to begin undressing before her slave, scarcely looking upon him as a man at all. She has very often treated me as though I were less than a man. However, here was her commission ; I must be off to the roulette-table and win at any cost. I had no time for thinking. Why had this money to be procured, and so promptly ? and what new chain of ideas had suddenly engaged the attention of this eternally busy head of hers ? Besides, during these two weeks of absence, it was clear that a whole world of new facts had started into existence, facts of which I knew nothing as yet. All these things must be studied and learned, and penetrated through and through ; however, there was no time now, I must be off to the gambling saloon.

CHAPTER II.

I CONFESS I did not like the business. Though I had quite made up my mind to gamble, I had not reckoned upon beginning for somebody else's account.

At first sight, I did not like the look of the place. I cannot bear that flunkeyish way that newspaper *festilletons* have all over the world, and especially in Russia, of describing these roulette halls on the Rhine and the masses of gold seen on the tables of these places as something so unusually magnificent and sumptuous. The authors are not paid to write the places up, they simply do so out of their own disinterested desire to do a little tall writing. The fact of the matter is, there is no sumptuousness whatever about these wretched hells ; and as for the gold lying about on the table, there is precious little of it to be seen. Of course occasionally some fellow appears on

the scene, some Englishman or rich Asiatic or Turk, and wins or loses enormous sums ; but other people only play for a few gulden^s at a time ; and, taking the average, there is very little gold to be seen on the table.

When I entered the gambling-room—for the first time in my life—I could not make up my mind to play for a while ; besides, there was too much of a crowd. However, if I had been alone instead of in the crowd, I think I should have gone home without playing at all.

I confess my heart beat a good deal and I was by no means cool or composed. I knew for certain and had long made up my mind that I should not leave Roulettenberg as I had entered it. Something was to happen to me here which should affect my destiny radically and essentially. So it must be, and so it should be. Strange as it was that I should expect so much for myself from roulette, yet I confess I consider it stranger still that people should always think in one groove on this point—agreeing that it is foolish or absurd to expect anything from the gambling-board.

And why is gambling worse than any other way of obtaining money—trade, for instance ? It may be very true that only one man wins out of a hundred—but what have I to do with that ? At all events, I determined to begin by watching ; and not to attempt anything very serious this first night.

This evening, if anything were to happen, it should be a mere chance stroke or two for small sums, and so I determined. First of all I must learn the game, as it were,—for notwithstanding the thousands of descriptions of roulette which I had read so greedily all my life, yet I had understood nothing whatever of the procedure, until I now watched it myself for the first time.

To begin with—the first impression on my mind which the scene caused, this evening, was one of contempt ; it all seemed so dirty—so morally low and dirty. I do not speak of all those hungry individuals who throng the tables by tens and hundreds. I see nothing dirty or mean in the desire to win as much and as quickly as possible. I have always thought that reply of the well-fed and independent moralist a very silly one, when somebody justified gambling by saying that “one only plays for small sums”—he replied, “so much the worse, for then the profits are small.” Just as though small and large profits did not amount to exactly the same thing. All things are comparative ; and

what is very little to Rothschild may be very much to me ; and as for winnings and profits—why, people are always doing their best to cut each other's throats, and get all they can out of their neighbours—they do not require the roulette-table for that !

Are profits and winnings bad in principle or not ? That is another question. But I am not going to attempt an answer here ; for being myself inspired with the greatest possible longing for gain, you may argue if you like, that all this greed of gain and the meanness of the whole business which struck me so on entering the hall, was simply a reflex of myself and ought not to have been strange or unfamiliar to *me* of all people.

Surely it is very delightful to be able to act without the slightest ceremony towards others ! besides, deceiving oneself is about the most absolutely unprofitable thing there is.

What at first sight seemed most repulsive about all this roulette-playing riss-raf, was the concentration and absorbing interest and almost *deference* with which they thronged round the tables. There are two classes of game—one can be played by respectable people ; the other cannot. There is the gentleman's game and the game of the rabble ; and what humbug the distinction is in reality !

For instance, a gentleman can stake his five or ten louis d'or, or his thousand francs, if he happens to be rich, but only for the sake of the game—as an amusement, in fact, and for the pleasure of watching the process of winning or losing ; but by no manner of means is he at liberty to be interested in the game as a winner or loser. He may win and laugh, and make some witty remark to his friend ; and stake again and win again and laugh louder, and double it again if he likes ; but merely for the fun of the thing, or out of curiosity to see how the chances run, and not with any plebeian wish to ~~win~~ money. In fact, the gentleman must look upon the whole thing as an entertainment got up for his amusement. As for the gains and dodges upon which the bank is founded and lives, he must not even suspect their existence.

How charming if such a man can persuade himself that all this host of intensely interested individuals, trembling with the excitement of gold-love, are exactly as himself, rich and gentlemanly, and play solely for the sake of a little distraction or amusement. Such innocence of the real truth of the matter, this guileless view of things and people, would certainly be delightfully aristocratic !

I have often seen mammas push their charming, innocent little daughters of fifteen or sixteen years old to the front, and teach them the game, staking a few gold pieces at a time for their benefit.

Our general, now, used to act like this: he would stalk up to the table with dignity and composure, haul out his purse very deliberately, fish out three hundred francs—taking a long while over the business—and stake it on the *black*. He would win this, and leave his three hundred and the winnings all on the black once more, and win again. Then he would leave the whole twelve hundred on the black a third time, and red would turn up; so the general would lose his twelve hundred francs, but keep up his character. I am pretty sure though, that if the stake had been two or three times higher still, he would have betrayed agitation, and spoiled the effect. However, this first time I saw some Frenchman or other win and then lose again thirty thousand francs without the slightest agitation, and with a merry smile on his face. A real gentleman, even if he were to lose his whole fortune, must not look as if he cared a jot about it. Money ought to be a matter too low for him to think about!

The ordinary rabble certainly does gamble in the dirtiest way possible. I admit, if you like, that the very commonest thieving goes on at the tables. The croupiers, who sit at the end of the tables and look after the stakes and payments, have a great deal to do. There is the blackguard—generally French—who—but I am not making these observations for the purpose of describing the game of roulette; I'm simply recording impressions to serve as experience for my own self in future. There is the class of blackguards who think nothing of putting out their hand and scraping up your winnings; and what's to be done in such a case? You make a row about it, and are asked for witnesses to prove that the stake was yours.

At first the whole game seemed to me like some illegible inscription—I could make neither head nor tail of it. All I could see was, that there were *numbers*, and the stakes were made on certain of these numbers, on even or uneven, and on black or red.

I determined to risk one hundred gulden's of Paulin's money to-night. The sense that I was playing with somebody else's money acted as a sort of damper to me. It was by no means a pleasant sensation; and I longed to be rid of it. I felt as

though I were prejudicing my own luck by beginning with Paulina's money. Could it be that it was impossible to have anything to do with the roulette-table without being infected with superstition?

Well, I began by fishing out fifty guldens and staking them on "even."

The wheel turned and "13" came up. I lost.

With a sort of sickly sensation that I'd better have it over as soon as possible and go home, I pulled out fifty more and put them on red.

Red came up.

I staked the whole hundred on red again.

Red came up again.

Once more I put the whole thing on red.

Red won a third time.

I now received four hundred guldens, and staked two hundred on the twelve middle numbers, without the slightest idea of what I was doing.

I was paid three times over, six hundred guldens, so that all of a sudden, I found that my hundred guldens had become *eight hundred*.

Some strange sensation at my heart now got hold of me and made itself so intolerable that I thought I had better be off. I felt that I should not play at all like this if I were staking for my own account. However, I thought I would just stake my whole eight hundred once more on "even."

This time "4" came up, and they shovelled me my own eight hundred and a similar sum across.

I snatched up the whole amount, sixteen hundred guldens, and went out to look for Paulina. They were all walking about in the park, and I only had an opportunity of seeing Paulina at the supper table. This time the Frenchman was not present, and the general was more talkative. Among other things he thought fit to observe once more that he would prefer if I avoided the gambling saloon. According to his view of the matter I should compromise him seriously if I were to lose much, by any chance.

"And even if you were to win much, I should be disagreeably compromised too," he added, significantly. "Of course I have no right to regulate your conduct; but just think for yourself how—"

As usual, he did not finish his sentence,

I answered drily that I had very little money to gamble with and could not well lose much, even if I were to take to gambling.

On going upstairs I found an opportunity to give Paulina her winnings, and I told her at the same time that I would not play for her again.

"Why not?" she asked anxiously.

"Because I want to gamble for myself," I replied, regarding her with surprise; "and staking for you at the same time puts me out."

"Then you persist in believing that roulette is your one hope and salvation?" she inquired, with an unpleasant jesting smile.

I answered, very seriously, that I did so persist. And that if my firm intention to win money were funny, so it must be; but that I wished to be left in peace with my convictions.

Paulina insisted that I must divide the day's winnings with herself and offered me eight hundred gulden; she said that we had better continue on these terms in the future. I refused absolutely to touch the money; and I told her that I objected to playing for her, not because I did not wish to oblige her, but because I should be certain to lose.

"Do you know," she said thoughtfully, "silly as it is, I can't help feeling that roulette is my one hope, too. And therefore, you must absolutely consent to gamble on these terms, half and half with me; and so you will of course."

Here she left me and would not listen to my repeated refusals.

CHAPTER III.

AND yesterday she did not say a word about gambling all day, indeed she seemed to avoid speaking to me at all; not that her usual manner towards me changed in the least. Oh dear no! there was the habitual careless and negligent, if not contemptuous air at each meeting with me. She is not at all anxious to conceal her dislike for me, I can see that much! At the same time it is especially clear that for some reason or other I am necessary to her and she must keep me going.

We have struck up a strange sort of intimacy with one another which is most incomprehensible to me, considering her pride and usual haughty bearing towards everyone. For instance, she knows that I love her to madness, and allows me to talk of my passion to herself; of course, she could not find a better way of expressing her contempt for me than by thus allowing me to speak as freely and as much as I please about my love. It is as though she said: "You see, your feelings are of so little account to me that it is entirely the same thing what you may choose to talk about with me, and *what* your feelings towards me may be." She always had been in the habit of speaking to me about her own private affairs, both now and formerly; but she was never quite open with me.

Not only that; but in her contempt for me there were refinements, like this, for instance: she is aware, we will suppose, that I know of certain circumstances of her life, or of some fact or other which is at the moment of the greatest interest or anxiety to herself. Perhaps she even tells me herself of such circumstances (if she requires to make use of me as a slave in order to attain her own private ends); but she tells me exactly so much as is absolutely necessary for me, as her tool, to know, and no more; and if I do not happen to know the whole truth about something in which she is engaged or interested, and am visibly anxious or worried on her account, she will never think of appeasing my anxiety by holding out to me a full measure of friendly candour; although, making use of me, as she does, often enough, not only for anxious but even for dangerous commissions, she might consider me entitled, at least, to such candour, if nothing more. She behaves as though it were not the least necessary to bother herself about my feelings and worries --even though those worries and anxieties be on her account and three times as intense as her own.

I knew of her intentions to try the roulette-table three weeks ago. She had even given me notice that I should have to play for her, because it was not "the thing" for her to be seen at the tables herself. I knew from the tone of her remarks, at the time, that she had some serious worry on hand, and that it was not simply a matter of wishing to win money in her case. What would be the use of money as money--to her? Oh, no! there is an object--there is a *something* behind, here, which I may very likely make a good guess at; but which up to now I know nothing of for certain.

Of course this humiliation and slavery, in which she holds me, might easily give me (such is often the case in similar circumstances) free hands to demand explanation and details as directly and rudely as I pleased—for since I am merely her slave, and a nonentity in her eyes, my vulgar curiosity could not offend her;—but the thing is, that though she allows me to ask her as many questions as I please, she does not answer them. Very often she does not even observe that I am talking to her.

There, those are the sort of relations in force between us. Yesterday we spoke a good deal about a certain telegram sent to St. Petersburg four days ago, and to which there had been no answer as yet.

The general is evidently in a state of nervous agitation, and is very thoughtful and quiet. Of course, it's all about the old lady, granpy. The Frenchman is anxious and agitated, too. Yesterday, for instance—after dinner—they all talked long and seriously about it; and the Frenchman's tone with all of us was unusually haughty and careless. He was acting up to the Russian proverb: “Give him a chance of sitting at table and he'll put his feet up!”

He is negligent and rude even towards Paulina; but he always seems ready to take part in any walks about the Vaux-hall garden, or riding and driving parties out of town.

I had long known of some of the circumstances which connected the Frenchman with our general: in Russia, for instance, they had started some kind of factory or other; I'm not sure whether the project came to grief or whether they still talk about it. Besides this, I knew—accidentally—part of the family secrets. The Frenchman had certainly lent the general thirty thousand roubles last year, when the latter required it; and, therefore, of course, the general was in his clutches. But just at present the principal part in the family play is being acted by Miss Blanche—there's no mistake about that.

Who is Miss Blanche? She is said to be a well known French girl, staying here with her mother, and possessed of an enormous fortune. She is also said to be some sort of a relative of our marquis (or count, or whatever he is), but a *very* distant relative, indeed; third cousin or something of that sort!

I am told that, before I went to Paris, the relations between Miss Blanche and her distant cousin were far more reserved and ceremonious; whereas, now, they are decidedly upon inti-

mate if not familiar terms. Perhaps things seem so very bad with our family just now that they do not think it necessary to stand on ceremony with us any more.

I noticed as long ago as the day before yesterday, that Mr. Astley looked at Miss Blanche and her mother as though he knew them of old. I think our Frenchman must have met Mr. Astley before, too. But Mr. Astley is so quiet and reserved that I don't think there's much to be got out of *him*. You won't catch *him* bringing dirt out of anyone's barn! However, the Frenchman scarcely bows to him and hardly even looks at him, so I suppose he has no cause to *fear* the Englishman. This is simple enough; but why does Miss Blanche ignore him? especially as the marquis blurted out yesterday that he knew Mr. Astley was very rich indeed! I should have thought *that* would make Miss Blanche look at him.

The general is still in a state of considerable nervous excitement of course; for a telegram announcing his aunt's death would be everything in the world to him!

Though it seemed to me pretty clear that Paulina was avoiding any conversation with me for some purpose of her own, still I thought it better to put on a cold and negligent air towards her, myself. I thought she would come up and speak to me in spite of her resolution. So I fixed my whole attention, both to-day and yesterday, on Miss Blanche.

The poor old general—he is quite done for! to fall in love at five and fifty, and so passionately, is indeed a misfortune! Add to this his widowerhood, his children, his property entirely lost, his debts—and lastly, a woman whom he has managed to fall desperately in love with!

Miss Blanche was pretty enough, but she had one of those faces which (if the expression will be understood) are enough to frighten anyone! At least, I know I have always been afraid of women with faces like that! She must be twenty-five years old, and is a broad-shouldered girl with magnificent bust and neck; her skin is rather brown and her hair black as a cloud, and enough of it for two people. Her eyes are black too, and the "whites" rather inclined to be yellow; their expression is decidedly insolent; her teeth are of the very whitest and her lips of the reddest; and there is always a smell of musk about her. She dresses with effect, richly, and her taste is always good. Her hands and feet are wonderful, her voice a strong contralto. She has a way of bursting out laughing, and show-

ing all her teeth at once, but generally she is quite grave and quiet, especially when Paulina and Maria Philipovna are by.

I don't think Miss Blanche has had any education, and I don't think she has much intellectual strength, but she is very cunning, and decidedly suspicious by nature. I should imagine that hers has not been an altogether uneventful life. And if the truth were told, I don't believe either that the marquis is her cousin, or that her mother is her real parent!

However, it appears that she and her mother had some very respectable acquaintances in Berlin, in which city we had first come across them.

As for the marquis, although I have the strongest suspicion as to his right to call himself by that title, still his claim to belong to good society, such as our set in Moscow, for instance, is beyond all doubt. I don't know what he may really be in France, but they say he has a château.

I am not sure whether anything decisive has been arranged between Miss Blanche and the general, as yet. Of course everything now depends upon the question of our financial situation, and whether the general can show money or not. If for instance, we were to receive news that granny was *not* dead, I am pretty sure Miss Blanche would disappear like a flash of lightning.

I can't help feeling astonishment (and amazement too) to think what a regular gossip-monger I have become of late. How I hate all this sort of thing, though! How gladly I should throw up both them and everything to do with them! But as if I can leave Paulina. As if I can give up spying around her. It's a villainous occupation—spying, of course. I know that well enough; but what do I care?

Mr. Astley, too, has interested me very much, both to-day and yesterday. I am certain he is in love with Paulina. It is both curious and amusing to see how much the expression of even a reserved and modest man, touched by the magic power of love, will reveal; and more especially, exactly at the very moment when the individual would rather the earth opened and swallowed him up than that he should disclose anything whatever, either by word or look. Mr. Astley meets us out walking very often. He takes his hat off and passes by,—dying with longing to join our party, of course. But if they invite him he refuses at once.

At all resting places, at the fountains, or near the music, or

in Vauxhall, he always sits down somewhere near us ; and wherever we are, in the park or in the wood, or on the Schlangenberg, we have only to glance around us and somewhere about—not far off at all events—on the grass near, or among the trees, there is sure to be Mr. Astley. I can't help thinking that he is looking out for an opportunity to speak to me privately. This morning we met and exchanged a couple of words. He has a very abrupt way with him, sometimes. He met me, and before we had time to say "good morning !" he blurted out :

" Miss Blanche, now. I have seen lots of women like Miss Blanche ! "

He only said that, and then looked significantly at me. I don't know what he was trying to give me to understand, because when I asked what he meant, he merely wagged his head with a knowing smile, and said :

" Oh, just so ! Is Miss Paulina fond of flowers ? "

" I don't know, I don't know at all," I said.

" How ? you don't know *that* ? " he cried, in great amazement, apparently.

" I really don't know, I have never remarked," I repeated, laughing.

" H'm ! that gives me an idea," he said, and he wagged his head again and went on further. He seemed to look pleased however.

We always talk the vilest French together, he and I.

CHAPTER IV.

TO-DAY has been a stupid, funny, absurd day. It is now eleven o'clock at night ; and I am sitting in my own room, thinking it all over.

The beginning of it was that I had to go to the roulette-table in the morning to gamble for Paulina. I took the whole of her sixteen hundred guldens under two conditions : that I was not going to play on half and half terms, that is, if I won I should not accept half the proceeds ; and secondly, that Paulina was to tell me frankly in the evening why she wanted

the money and how much she required. I still cannot believe that she simply desired to win money. Evidently she *must* have money, and soon too, for some special purpose.

She promised to tell me all about it, so off I went. There was a fearful crush at the tables. What insolent beggars they are, and how frantically thirsty for gold! Well, I crushed myself into the middle and took my stand near the croupier. Then I began, timidly, to try the game, staking two or three coins at a time. Meanwhile I kept my eyes open and took observations; it seemed to me that all this calculation which so many of the players practise is nothing like so important as they believe. They sit with bits of paper pencilled all over before them, jotting down, calculating, sifting the chances, adding up—and at last stake their money and lose it just the same as the rest of us do—simple mortals, who play without calculations and systems!

However, I observed one thing, and I believe my opinion is right enough here. It is certain that in the sequence of accidental chance there rules—if not system, a sort of order—which is very strange of course; but it is so. For instance, it comes out that after the twelve middle numbers have turned up, the twelve higher ones are called—twice, we'll suppose, and away goes the luck to the twelve lower ones. Having touched them once it passes to the twelve middle numbers again and turns up three or four times consecutively; after which the twelve higher numbers are called again—twice perhaps—then the twelve lower ones, then the middle ones four times again, and so on; very often for hours at a time.

Then again, sometimes for a whole day, the red and black alternate, so regularly that you never see the black turn up more than a couple or so of times consecutively. Another day, or perhaps another hour of the same day, the red will have a run of twenty turns or so, and will do this several times during a stated period—perhaps for a whole day.

Mr. Astley pointed out a good many of these phenomena to me; he stood all day at the roulette-table, but did not stake anything the whole time.

As for myself, I lost everything I had in a wonderfully short space of time. I began by putting two hundred guldens on "even," and winning; I staked it again on even and won again; and so for two or three times consecutively, till I had somewhere about four thousand guldens in hand in the first five minutes.

I ought to have swept it all up and gone away then ; but a strange feeling got hold of me, a sort of insane desire to put out my tongue at Fate and tweak its nose, so I staked the maximum permissible—four thousand guldens—all at once, and lost it. Then I fetched out all I had about me and staked *that*, and lost again ; after which I rose and left the table with my head buzzing round.

I could not understand what had been the matter with me, and I told Paulina of my fiasco only just before dinner, up to which time I had been maundering about the park. At dinner I was again in an excited state, just as I had been three days ago ; the Frenchman and Miss Blanche were both dining with us.

It appears that Miss Blanche had been in the roulette-room in the morning and had watched my play. She conversed with me more—or rather took more notice of me this time. The Frenchman did not stand on ceremony, but asked me straight out whether it was really the case that I had lost my money. It seems to me that he has a suspicion that it was Paulina's, anyhow there is something in the air. I simply told him a lie, and said the money was my own. The general was very much astonished. Where could I have raised such a sum of money ?

I explained that I had commenced with ten friedrichs d'or (a hundred guldens) and had doubled it at the first stake, and redoubled it four or five times consecutively, until I had six or seven thousand guldens ; and that then I had lost the whole thing at a couple of turns of the wheel.

Of course all this was plausible enough ; and as I told the story I glanced at Paulina ; but I could make nothing out of her face. At all events, she had allowed me to lie and had not corrected me, so I concluded that I had done right in thus lying and concealing the fact that I had gambled for her account. However, I thought, “she is bound to explain it all to me now, and she promised to tell me some secret or other, so I shall soon know.”

I thought the general would be sure to make a remark to me about my playing ; but he was silent. However, I observed that he was looking much agitated and uncomfortable ; perhaps, in the present strained state of his financial affairs he was simply put out to hear of such sums of money being won and lost again in the space of a quarter of an hour, by such an

insignificant fool as myself. I have a shrewd suspicion that he and the Frenchman had rather a warm altercation last night ; at all events they were talking excitedly together for a long while, with closed doors. The Frenchman had gone away very late, looking extremely put out, and had turned up again early this morning, no doubt to continue yesterday's conversation.

When he heard of my losing, the Frenchman cuttingly remarked—even maliciously, I thought—that I ought to have used more common sense ; and then he added, I don't know why, that though many Russians played at the roulette-tables, according to his ideas Russians were not at all fitted for the game by nature.

"Oh ! now, I think the game must have been invented especially for Russians," I replied ; and when the Frenchman laughed contemptuously at my remark, I observed that there was no doubt about the matter, and that in calling Russians good gamblers I was paying them the reverse of a compliment and that therefore I was the more entitled to belief.

"And what do you find your opinion upon ?" he asked.

"Because in the category of the virtues and dignities of civilised western man, the faculty of accumulating wealth has been accepted as the principal desideratum ; and a Russian is not only unfitted to amass wealth, but he even spends it, when he has it, in a foolish and ridiculous way entirely his own. But none the less we Russians need money," I added, "and therefore we are the more delighted to find some means, like the roulette-table, of becoming rich in an hour or so, without having to work for it. The very idea of such means captivates us wonderfully ; and since we play loosely and carelessly, of course we lose."

"That's partly true," said the self-satisfied Frenchman.

"No, it's not true, and you ought to be ashamed of talking of your countrymen like that," said the general, severely and cuttingly.

"Why, excuse me," I remarked, "but it is by no means certain as yet whether the Russian awkwardness or the German facility for amassing wealth by honest labour is worse."

"What an unworthy idea !" cried the general.

"What a thoroughly Russian notion," remarked the Frenchman.

I laughed ; I was most anxious to "get a rise" out of them.

"I'd rather spend all my life in a Kirghiz tent, than bow down before the German idol," I said.

"What idol?" cried the general, beginning to be seriously angry.

"Why, the German faculty of making money," I said. "I have not been here long yet, but all I have seen goes dreadfully against the grain of my Tartar extraction. I swear I wouldn't give tuppence for their kind of virtue. I had time to walk a few miles round about here yesterday, and I assure you it was all line upon line the same as in the little German moral lesson books, with pretty pictures. Every house has its *Vater*, a fearfully virtuous and alarmingly honest individual. So honest that one is afraid to go near him. Every such *Vater* has his family, and every evening they read school books out loud to one another. Oh, it's all most poetical and touching, I assure you. Don't be angry, general, and let me proceed," I continued. "Why, I remember how my own father used to read to my mother and me of an evening in the garden, so I am a good judge of all this kind of business. Well, so every one of these German families lives in a state of full servitude towards the *Vater*, and is absolutely dependent upon him. They all heap up money, like Jews. We'll suppose the father has collected a certain number of guldens and is thinking of giving over his little property or his savings to his eldest son. In order to effect this, the daughter gets no marriage portion, and consequently does not marry; the younger son is got rid of, into service or the army or something, and the family hoard goes on increasing. I assure you this is the way with them here, I asked them myself. Well, what next? the honest *Vater* blesses them all round and dies; and another round begins. The eldest son becomes another virtuous and terribly honest *Vater*, the younger sons go out to sacrifice smiling, and the daughters remain unmarried, and all for the good of the family capital; and sure enough the capital has mounted up wonderfully, and so on, and so on, until you have your Rothschilds or deuce knows who. There's a magnificent spectacle. A century or two of toil and wisdom, and suffering, and grubbing, and firmness, and storks on the roof. What can you have nobler or higher. And from this majestic height these good people range the whole of the rest of the world before them and judge it; and the measure of right and wrong is the difference between themselves and others; any divergence

from the standard of themselves is sinful and must be punished. Well, all I can say is, I'd rather be a Russian debauchee, or have my fling at the roulette-table. I don't want to be a Rothschild of five generations of money grubbing. I want money for myself and am not at all inclined to consider myself nothing but a being necessary to the proper accumulation of capital. I may be wrong, but that is my humble opinion."

"I don't know how far you may be right or wrong," said the general, thoughtfully; "but I *do* know this, that you have begun fooling unbearably, and that if one allows you to forget yourself in the least degree, you . . ."

As usual, he did not finish his sentence.

Whenever the general begins a sentence which is in the slightest degree worth listening to, he invariably stops short before he gets it all out.

The count had stared a little, and listened carelessly. He hardly understood a word of what I had said.

Paulina had listened with a sort of haughty composure. I don't think she heard a word of what either I or anyone else had said at the table.

CHAPTER V.

SHE was most unusually thoughtful. As soon as we came out of the dining-room, she told me to come and walk about with her.

We took the children with us and went into the park towards the fountains.

Being in an excited state, I commenced by asking her, stupidly and rudely too, why the Frenchman, Marquis de Gier, not only no longer walked about with her as he used, but very often did not speak to her for whole days at a time?

"Because he is a scoundrel," she replied, strangely.

I had never heard her fly out like this before on the subject of the Frenchman, and I was afraid to come to too hasty a conclusion as to the reason for her annoyance.

"Did you notice that he and the general are not on very cordial terms to-day?" I asked.

"You wish to know the reason of it!" she said drily and with evident annoyance. "You are aware that the general is entirely in his hands, and that all the general's property is mortgaged to him. If granny does not die at once, the Frenchman will most undoubtedly enter into possession of the whole thing."

"Oh, it's true, then, that the whole estate is mortgaged! I had heard so, but I did not know whether it was true or not."

"Of course it is."

"Then it's a case of 'Good-bye, Miss Blanche!'" I remarked. "And she will never be Mrs. General! Do you know what? I think it quite likely that the general, being so frantically in love as he is, is capable of blowing his own brains out if Miss Blanche throws him over."

"Yes, I, too, think that something of the sort may happen," said Paulina, reflectively.

"A nice sort of business altogether," I cried. "And she couldn't show more brutally and vulgarly, if she tried ever so hard, that she was marrying him solely for money. There is no attempt at ordinary decency; the whole thing is done entirely without ceremony. It really is beautiful! And as for this granny business, what could be more comically mean and petty than to send telegram after telegram asking whether she is dead, and whether she is dead again. Eh? What do you think of all this, Paulina Alexandrovna?"

"You are talking nonsense," she said with disgust; "and I should like to know what you are so pleased about this evening? surely not because you have lost all my money for me?"

"Why did you give it to me to lose? Didn't I tell you that I could not play for other people, especially yourself? I obey whatever command you may impose on me; but the result is not my look out. I told you beforehand that nothing would come of it. Tell me, are you much cut up at having lost the money? What did you require it for?"

"Why do you ask these questions?"

"You told me yourself that you would let me know all about it. Now, listen. I am absolutely convinced that when I begin to play for myself (and I have got two hundred gulden to begin upon), I shall win. And then you can just take what you want from me."

She made a gesture of contempt.

"Don't be angry with me for such a suggestion," I continued; "I am so impressed with the consciousness that I am a nonentity before you—that is, in your eyes—that you can safely take money from me. You cannot be offended by a present of money from *me*; besides, I lost yours for you."

She glanced quickly at me, and, observing that I was speaking sarcastically and under the influence of annoyance, she again changed the conversation.

"There is nothing to interest you in my affairs. If you wish to know: I am in debt, and that's all about it. I have borrowed some money, and I am anxious to pay it back. I had a strange and foolish conviction that I was destined to win money here at the roulette-table. I don't know why I had this idea; but I had it and believed in it. Who knows, perhaps I believed in it for the simple reason that I had no choice of any other way out of my difficulty."

"Or, in other words, because it was *too necessary* for you to win. This is simply the old story of the drowning man clutching at a straw. You will agree with me, that if he had not been drowning, he would never have mistaken the straw for a firm piece of wood."

Paulina was surprised.

"Why," she said, "didn't you say you trusted to exactly the same means yourself? A couple of weeks ago you told me over and over again that you were convinced that you would win at the gaming-tables, and you persuaded me not to look upon you as a lunatic for harbouring such a conviction; were you joking? I remember you spoke so seriously, though, that it is impossible to believe you could have been joking."

"No," I said, thoughtfully, "it's quite true, to this day I am fully persuaded that I shall win. I will even admit that you have caused me to ask myself the question: Why my stupid, idiotic loss of this morning has not had the least damping effect upon *my* conviction? And yet it has not, and I am as sure as ever that as soon as I begin to gamble for myself, I shall win."

"*Why* are you so fully persuaded of this?"

"Well—if you like—I don't know myself. All I know is that I *must* win, and that it is my only salvation. Perhaps that is the reason for my firm conviction that *I shall win*."

"So that it is *too necessary* for you to win also, since you are so fanatically sure of winning."

"I would not mind betting that you doubt whether I am capable of realizing any serious need for anything?"

"No; it's all the same to me what you may feel," she replied coldly. "But, if you like—yes, I *do* doubt whether you are capable of taking anything to heart very seriously. You can worry yourself, I daresay; but not seriously. You are a sort of disorganized, unprincipled man. What do you want money for? Among all the reasons you gave me, at that time, I never found one that had any serious element in it."

"Meanwhile," I interrupted, "you say you wish to repay a debt; it's a pleasant sort of debt, I may infer; to the Frenchman, perhaps?"

"What curious questions you are asking; you are particularly cutting to-day—have you been drinking?"

"You know very well that I claim the right to say and ask anything I like. I repeat, I am your slave, and you can neither feel offence at a slave's words nor be shamed by him in any way."

"That's all nonsense; besides, I can't bear that 'slave' theory of yours!"

"Yes, but be so good as to observe that I do not speak of my slavery because I like or wish to be your slave; but simply as a fact which exists whether I like it or no."

"Tell me candidly, what do *you* want money for?"

"Why do you wish to know?"

"Very well; as you like," and she tossed her head haughtily.

"You 'can't bear the slave theory,' and yet you exact slavery from me. I am to answer you and never complain. Very well, agreed. You wish to know why I want money? how do you mean? Why, money is simply *everything*."

"I quite understand that; but one need not go mad because one wants it. You go out of your mind about money; you indulge in fatalism. You must have got some special object; tell me, now, without any nonsense and beating about the bush. I wish it."

She seemed to be growing angry; and I was delighted beyond expression to see her thus in earnest in her questioning of me.

"Of course there is an object," I said; "but I don't think I can tell you what it is. Well, simply, that when I have money I shall be a different man altogether in your eyes—and no longer your slave."

"How so? How is that to come about?"

"How shall I bring it about? Do you mean to tell me you do not even understand how I shall bring you to think of me as other than a slave? Dear me! I don't like this density on your part."

"You said that this 'slavery' was a sort of satisfaction to you. I thought it was, too."

"You thought so?" I cried. I enjoyed this conversation amazingly. "How charming this naive manner of yours is. Yes—of course I hug my chains—chains that *you* have rivetted. There is—there *is* a satisfaction in the very lowest limit of insignificance," I raved. "The deuce only knows, perhaps there may be a similar subtlety of delight in the operation of being scourged, when the lash tears bits of quivering flesh out of one's back. But for all that, I may prefer to make a trial of other kinds of joy. The general read me a sermon just now, in your presence, all under the privilege of paying me seven hundred roubles per annum (which I never see). Marquis de Grier elevates his eyebrows and inspects me, and at the same time takes no notice of me. And I, for my part, should be extremely happy to pull the aristocratic gentleman's nose in your presence."

"That's all talk, of course; and very silly talk, too. Any body can behave with dignity under any circumstances. An assault need not humiliate the person assaulted, on the contrary, it is very often the reverse."

"Why, you are talking out of a book. But supposing that I can't behave with dignity? That is, I may be a most worthy individual and yet cannot behave with dignity; this is the case sometimes, you know. Why, all the Russians are like that, and do you know why? because they are too richly endowed and too many-sided to place themselves, easily, in any prescribed groove. We require genius and nothing less, before we can put on an external form which is not natural to us."

"It is only Frenchmen, and perhaps some other Europeans who can look like most worthy mortals, and be in reality most infernal scoundrels; they have their outside shell so perfectly under control; and that's why the outside shell is so important a matter with them. Now, a Frenchman can take an insult—a deadly, serious insult—and will not even frown; but he can't stand having his nose tweaked, because that is the destruction of the accepted form of personal decorum."

"And the reason all you young ladies are so fond of the French is because their outer shell and form is so correct. Personally, I consider the fellows a set of bantam cocks ; but then I don't pretend to understand the question, not being a woman. Perhaps bantam cocks may be most worthy animals. I don't know at all—I may be wrong all round—why don't you stop me and tell me so? I want to tell you everything, everything ; and, to tell you the truth, I don't believe I have either outer form, or inner worth either ; in fact I don't care a hang whether I am 'worthy' or not. I have lost all 'go ;' you know why, well enough. I have not a single human thought or idea left in my head. I have lost—long since—all interest in the world and what goes on in it—why, the other day I passed through Dresden, and I haven't the slightest idea now what Dresden was like. You know well enough what has choked me. Since I haven't the slightest hope and am a mere nonentity in your eyes, I don't care what I say. You are the only thing I see anywhere, nothing else is of the slightest interest to me. Why, and how I love you, I cannot say. Do you know—I daresay, for all I know—you are not even pretty—fancy that! I can't tell whether your face is pretty or not. Your heart is not a good one, I'm sure enough of that ; and your nature is mean—that's very likely—"

"Perhaps the reason you expect to be able to *buy* me with your money, when you have it, is because you believe me to be so mean?"

"When did I expect to buy you with money?" I cried.

"The fact is, you've been talking nonsense and lost the thread of what you were saying. If it is not myself, it is my esteem you expect to be able to purchase."

"No, not quite that, I told you I couldn't explain what I wanted money for. You confuse me, you mustn't be angry at my fooling like this ; you must see that it is not fair to be angry with me, because I am mad, simply. However it's all the same to me whether you are angry or not. Upstairs, in my room, I have only to recall or imagine the rustle of your dress, and I am ready to gnaw my fingers. What are you angry with me for? Because I call myself your slave? Make the most of my slavehood, make the most of it—profit by it. Are you aware that I shall murder you one fine day? I shall not kill you because I shall have ceased to love you, then, and am jealous of you—oh, dear no! I shall simply murder you,

casually, because every now and then I feel that I must eat you up ; you are laughing—”

“ I am not laughing at all,” she replied angrily ; “ I command you to be quiet.”

She paused, hardly able to draw her breath for rage. Upon my honour I don’t know whether she was pretty or not ; but I did love to see her stand before me like this, panting with rage ; and therefore I always took a special pleasure in rousing her anger. Perhaps she saw this and got angry on purpose. I told her so.

“ How detestable you are,” she said with quiet disgust.

“ I don’t care,” I continued. “ Do you know, it is dangerous for you and me to be alone like this, for often and often I have been sorely tempted to kill you, mangle you, smother you ! Do you think it won’t come to this ? You drive me to distraction. Do you suppose I am afraid of the scandal of the thing, or of your anger ? Why, I love you without hope, and I know very well that I shall love you a thousand times more than ever after I have killed you. If I kill you, I shall have to commit suicide afterwards, of course ; but I shall put off killing myself as long as possible in order to try what the intolerable sensation of being without you is like. I’ll tell you a most astonishing thing. I love you more every day, and that’s almost an impossibility. And I am not to be a fatalist after all this ! You remember, the day before yesterday on the Schlangenberg, when you drew me out, and I whispered to you, ‘ Say the word, and I jump down here headlong ! ’ If you had said the word, I should have jumped down then and there. Don’t you believe that I should have jumped down ? ”

“ What stupid foolery you are talking ! ” she cried.

“ I don’t care whether it’s stupid or wise,” I said ; “ all I know is that when I am with you I must talk and talk and talk, and so I am talking. I always lose all my self-respect before you, so I don’t care what I say.”

“ Why do you suppose I should tell you to jump off the Schlangenberg ? ” she asked, drily and irritably ; “ it wouldn’t be the slightest use to me.”

“ That’s good,” I tried. “ You say ‘ use ’ on purpose to overwhelm me. I understand you thoroughly—not the slightest use.’ Indeed ! Why, satisfaction is always of use to one ; and savage, unlimited power, even if only over a fly, has

its own special delight. Man is a despot by birth, and loves to bully others. You enjoy it yourself, thoroughly."

I remember she looked at me just then with a sort of concentrated attention. Probably my face was expressing all the foolish and silly sensations that were rioting in my brain. I remember now that our conversation was almost word for word as I have noted it down here. My eyes were bloodshot, and there was a rim of foam round my lips. As for the Schlangenberg business, I swear that if she had said the word, I would have hurled myself off the rock at once. If she had said it in joke, if she had said it contemptuously, bitterly, I should have jumped over, all the same.

"I quite believe you. Why not?" she said, as only she can speak at times, with such a wealth of contempt, and even malice, in her voice—with such haughtiness that I swear I could have killed her on the spot. She ran a great risk. I was not exaggerating when I told her it was dangerous to be alone with me!

"Are you a coward or not?" she asked me, suddenly.

"I don't know," I said; "I may be, and I may not. I haven't thought of it for a long time."

"If I were to say to you: 'Kill this man for me,' would you kill him?"

"Whom?"

"Whomever I choose."

"Is it the Frenchman?"

"Don't ask questions, but just answer me. Whomever I choose to name. What I want to find out is, whether you were serious just now or not." She stood and waited for my answer with so serious and impatient an air that I really felt quite strange.

"Will you or will you not tell me what is going on here?" I cried. "Are you afraid of me, or what? I can see for myself that everything is topsy-turvy. You are step-daughter to a ruined and insane old man who is eaten up with passion for this demon, Blanche! Then there's this Frenchman with his mysterious influence over you, and then—here you come, suddenly, springing this question upon me! At all events, let me know what it all means; otherwise I shall be putting my foot in it, and doing something fatal. Are you ashamed of giving me your confidence? As though you could be ashamed of anything on ~~my~~ account!"

"I am not talking about that. I asked you a question, and I am waiting for your answer."

"Of course I would kill him," I shouted, "anybody you told me to. But as if you can, as if you would give me such an order!"

"Why not? Do you think I should be sorry for you? Why, I should give you the order and myself stand aside. Could you tolerate that? Not a bit of it. You might murder him in obedience to my command, but then you'd come back and kill me too, for daring to send you on such an errand."

Something seemed to strike me to the core as I listened to these words.

Of course I accepted them, even then, as half in joke; but why was she so terribly serious? I was astonished that she should have expressed herself thus, that she should claim this right over me and be content to wield such dreadful power over me that she could say, "Go to your ruin, while I stand aside." There was something so very cynical and so ultra-frank, about these words, that I did not quite like it. Why, what could she think of a man to whom she could address such words? Surely this was going beyond the limits even of slavery and insignificance. This sort of thing ought to bring a man to himself; but, for all the absurdity and nonsensical tendency of our conversation, my heart was trembling within itself.

Suddenly she burst out laughing. We were sitting on a bench, with the children playing about in front of us, exactly opposite the spot where the carriages stopped and people got out to walk up and down the avenue which runs parallel with the Vauxhall.

"Do you see that stout old lady?" she cried. "That is Baroness Warmerholm; she has only been here three days; and that's her husband, that long thin Prussian with a stick in his hand. Do you remember how he looked at us a couple of days ago? Well, go up to the baroness, take off your hat, and say something impertinent to her in French."

"Why?"

"You vowed you were ready to jump off the Schlangenberg, you vow that you are ready to murder somebody for me; but instead of these tragedies and murders, I simply wish to have a good laugh. Go and do it, without beating about the bush. I wish to see the baron strike you with his stick."

"You challenge me, do you? You think I won't do it?"

"Yes, I challenge you to do it. Go on, I insist upon it."

"Very well, I will, though it is a wild idea on your part. But I don't wish to be the cause of any unpleasantness, afterwards, to the general, and through him to you. I swear I am not thinking of myself, but only of you--and the general. Besides, what is the use of going up to a woman and insulting her in cold blood?"

"Oh, I see you are a mere sham," she said, contemptuously. "Your eyes were blood-shot just now, but it was from no nobler cause than too much wine at dinner. Do you suppose I don't understand that it is a foolish and idiotic freak, and that the general will be very angry? I tell you I wish to have a good laugh—I wish it, and that's enough! Besides, you won't insult a woman; you'll get beaten by the old man long before you can do that."

I turned away, and silently set about fulfilling her command. Of course it was a silly business, and, of course, I could not now get out of it; but I remember that when I began to approach the baroness, a sort of schoolboy sense of mischief got possession of me. I was irritated and excited too, just as though I were really drunk, as Paulina had said.

CHAPTER VI.

TWO days have passed since that silly afternoon. And what a fuss, and bother, and row, and noise there has been. And I am the cause of all the fluttering in the dove-cot! It seems irresistibly droll, too, sometimes—to me, at all events. I cannot answer myself when I ask what on earth I have been up to all this time. Am I really and absolutely mad, or have I simply strayed from the path, just to have a little fling with my hind legs until they come and tie me up again? At times I can't help thinking that my brains have suffered, and at others I seem to be a child still, a sort of mischievous schoolboy just out of class.

It's Paulina—it's all Paulina! I daresay I should not be playing the schoolboy were it not for her. Who knows, perhaps *despair* is the cause of it all—what a silly idea! And

I can't understand, I *can't* understand what there is about her so bewitching to me. She is pretty, I think—yes, she is pretty. Other people lose their heads for her too. She's tall, and beautifully built; very thin, though. I think one could tie her up in a parcel, or bend her in two. Her footprint is a long narrow one, it drives me wild to look at it. Her hair has an auburn tint about it. Her eyes are like a cat's, regular cat's eyes, but how proudly and haughtily she can stare out of them!

Four months ago, or so, when I had only just joined the family, I remember she had a long and earnest conversation with De Grier one evening, and how she looked at him. When I went upstairs to bed I imagined her giving him a mighty box on the ear and then looking at him like that; she would do it, too, and would stand and look at him afterwards exactly like that, I know. Well, it is since this evening that I have loved her.

However, let me get back to my story.

I walked along the by-path which led to the avenue, stood in the middle of the avenue and waited for the baron and baroness. When they came within about five paces, I took off my hat and bowed.

I remember the baroness was dressed in a light coloured dress, with a crinoline, and a train. She was a little woman, unusually fat, with such a double chin that it was quite impossible to see her neck. She had a red face and small insolent-looking eyes. She went along as though she felt that the homage of all she met was but her due.

The baron was a dry-looking, tall, old fellow. His face, as usual with Germans, was crooked and was divided into a thousand wrinkles; he wore spectacles and was probably not more than about forty-five years old in reality. His legs seemed to begin at his chest, which is a sign of good birth, I am told. He looked as proud as a peacock as he strutted slowly along. There was a sort of sheepish expression on his face, which he intended should imply depth of intellect.

All this I noticed in the space of three seconds.

My bow and my doffed hat scarcely attracted their attention, for the first moment or two. The baron merely raised his eyebrows slightly; the baroness sailed along, straight for me.

"*Madame la Baronne*," I said very distinctly, and aloud,

and accentuating each syllable: "*J'ai l'honneur d'être votre esclave.*"

After which I put my hat on again, and passed by the baron's side, looking politely at him and smiling. Paulina had told me to take off my hat; but as for the bowing and the tom-foolery, I threw that in of my own accord. I don't know what had possessed me, but I felt at this moment as if I had wings and was flying through space.

"*Hein?*" cried or rather croaked the baron, turning and looking at me with angry surprise.

I turned and waited in an attitude of courteous expectancy, continuing to gaze into his face and smile pleasantly. He evidently did not believe his eyes, and stretched his eyebrows to an impossible extent. His face clouded over more and more.

The baroness also turned and began to regard me with equal surprise and wrath. The passers-by were beginning to watch us; some even stopped to stare.

"*Hein?*" cried the baron again, with redoubled croaking and redoubled rage.

"*Ja wohl!*" I whined, continuing to stare straight into his eyes.

"*Sind Sie rasend?*" he cried, making a threatening gesture with his stick, but beginning, I thought, to funk out of it a little. Probably my costume rather puzzled him. I was very well and even fashionably dressed, in fact I looked like a man entitled to belong to the very best society.

"*Ja wo-o-o-hl!*" I cried suddenly, with all the power of my lungs, and prolonging the sound of the "o," just as the Berlin people do in their perpetual use of the phrase, "*Ja wohl!*" when they wish by the longer or shorter duration of the "o" sound to express various shades of thought and feeling.

The baron and baroness turned and almost ran from me in their terror.

Some of the passers-by whispered among themselves, others stared at me in astonishment; but, to say the truth, I don't remember very clearly what I did. I turned on my heel and walked with my usual deliberate step towards Paulina; but before I came near her bench, I saw her rise and go away towards the hotel with the children. I caught her up at the front door.

"I've fulfilled your tom-foolery," I said, as I came alongside of her.

"Well, what then? Now you may go and take the consequences," she said without even looking at me; and went upstairs.

I walked about the park all the evening. Then I took a turn into the wood and walked on till I came into the next duchy. I had an omelette and some wine at a cottage; for which idyllic meal I had the satisfaction of paying a thaler and a half. I reached home at eleven o'clock, and was immediately sent for to the general's room.

Our people occupy two suites, containing four rooms, in the hotel. The first room is a big place, with a piano in it; next to it is another fine large room, the general's study; and here he was awaiting me. He stood in the middle of the room, in a state of great majesty and dignity; De Grier was sprawling on a sofa.

"Allow me to ask you, my good friend, what you have been up to?" began the general.

"I will thank you, general," I said, "to confine yourself strictly to business. You probably wish to speak to me about my meeting this morning with a certain German?"

"With a certain German, indeed! That German, sir, is Baron Warmerholm, a very eminent personage indeed. You have been guilty of rudeness to him and the baroness."

"Not the least in the world!"

"You frightened them, sir," shouted the general.

"Not the least bit, I tell you. When I was in Berlin I heard quite enough of the perpetual repetition of '*Ja wohl*,' after every word, and of the disgusting way they have of distorting the sound and lengthening it out; and when I met these people in the park, I don't know why, but I couldn't help thinking of this expression, '*Ja wohl*,' and the thought of it acted upon me as an irritant. Besides this, the baroness, on every one of the three occasions that I have met her, has made a point of walking straight at me, as though I were a worm, and she wanted to squash me with her foot. Excuse me, but I have a little self-respect of my own, as well as bigger swells; so I took off my hat, and politely (it was politely, I assure you) said to her, '*Madame, j'ai l'honneur d'être votre esclave!*'"

"When the baron whisked round, and called out '*Hein!*' something prompted me to cry, '*Ja wohl!*' I shouted it twice; the first time in usual tone and the second time draw-

ling out the "o," and shouting it as loud as I could, and that's the whole story."

I confess I took the greatest delight in explaining the thing in this most puerile manner. I had the wildest longing to make the story seem as foolish and absurd as ever I could. And the further I went the more decided did this taste become.

"You are laughing at me, sir," cried the general. He turned to the Frenchman, and explained to him, in French, that I admitted the truth of the story; De Grier smiled and shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, don't think twice about it," I cried; "it was nothing at all, general. My act was a foolish one, I admit it, with the greatest possible candour; it was an act of stupid tom-foolery, if you like to call it so, and was very indecorous, and all that; but nothing more. I confess to my act, such as it is, with absolute frankness. But there is a circumstance connected with the case which, I think, would even absolve me from the necessity of confession, and that is that for the last two or three weeks I have been feeling very unwell—a sort of nervous, irritable, fantastic malady which occasionally causes me to lose all control over my will.

"I assure you I have several times been on the very point of coming up to the Marquis de Grier, there, and—but perhaps I had better not say it; I might offend him. Well, in a word, these are symptoms of my malady. I don't know whether the baroness will make allowance for this circumstance when I apologise to her (for I intend to beg that lady's pardon, of course); I don't much think she *will* take account of it; because I hear that the excuse has been a good deal abused, of late, in the law-courts—counsel for the defence have been bringing it forward too often and saying, 'my client struck him, but remembers nothing about it,' and that sort of thing; implying that the criminal was the victim of a mental disorder. And fancy, general, the medical profession actually supports the doctrines of such counsel for the defence; it does indeed; it says 'yes, there is such a malady, and its victims do not remember what they did, when under its influence,' or only 'half remember, or *quarter* remember, or something.' But the baron and baroness, you see, are people belonging to a former age—and therefore probably this progress in the judicial and medical world will not have reached their ears; and so they *will* not make allow-

ances for my particular circumstances, as explained. What do you think yourself, general?"

"Enough—my friend!" said the general cuttingly, and with suppressed wrath, "that is quite enough, thank you! I shall endeavour, once and for all, to put myself outside of the influence of your school-boy tricks. You shall *not* apologize to the baron and baroness. Anything to do with yourself—though the connection were nothing more than the receiving by them of your apologies—would be far too humiliating for them. The baron, hearing that you belonged to my household, took the opportunity of speaking to me at the Vauxhall; and I assure you, it wanted but little for him to have called me out. Do you understand, sir, what you have laid me open to—me, sir? I—I was forced to beg pardon of the baron, and to give him my solemn word that this day—this very day—you should cease to belong to my household."

"One moment, general, one moment!—so he insisted of his own accord, did he, that I should cease to belong to your household—as you are pleased to express it?"

"No, but I considered myself in honour bound to give him this satisfaction, and of course my assurance satisfied the baron. So we shall part, my friend. You are entitled to these four friedrichs d'or and three gulden, according to the exchange of the country. Here is the money, and here is your account—verify it, if you like. Good-bye. From this moment we are strangers; excepting unpleasantness and worries, I have had nothing out of you. I shall now call up the kellner and tell him that from to-morrow's date I am not responsible for your expenses in this hotel. I have the honour to be your humble servant."

I took the money and the paper with my account scrawled upon it in pencil, bowed to the general, and addressed him very seriously as follows:

"General, the affair cannot end so. I am very sorry to hear that you have had any unpleasantness with the baron; but if you will excuse me for saying so, the fault is your own. By what right did you take it upon yourself to answer for me to this baron? What do you mean by the expression that 'I belong to your household?' I am a tutor in your house, that's all. I am not your son. I am not your ward. You have no right to answer for my actions. I am myself a legally competent and responsible person. I am twenty-five years old, a

member of the university, I am of noble birth, and I am absolutely a stranger to yourself. It is only my boundless respect for your worthy person which at this moment is preventing me from demanding satisfaction from you and a full explanation of what you meant by presuming to take upon yourself to answer to the baron for me."

The general was so overwhelmed with astonishment that his hands dropped to his sides. Then he turned quickly to the Frenchman and hurriedly communicated to him that I had this moment all but called him out.

The Frenchman burst out laughing.

"However I shall not let the baron go so easily," I continued with great composure, and not in the least disconcerted by the Frenchman's guffaw. "And as you, general, have, by consenting to listen to the baron's complaint this day and by taking his part in the matter, made yourself, as it were, a participator in the affair, I have the honour to inform you that, not later than to-morrow morning, I shall ask the baron, in my own name, for a full and formal explanation of the reasons by which he, having to deal with myself in a certain matter, thought fit to pass me by and refer himself to another person, just as though I either could not, or were unworthy to answer for myself."

What I anticipated now took place. The general, on listening to my latest nonsensical departure, became terribly frightened.

"How! surely you don't intend to keep this damnable business going?" he cried. "What are you *doing*, my dear sir?—Good heavens! what will become of me? Don't dare to do it, sir, don't you dare to do it, or I swear I'll—there's a police system here too, sir, and I'll—I'll—in a word, my rank will—and the baron too,—in short—we'll have you arrested and sent out of the place between two soldiers; you shall not swagger here, sir. Do you understand me, sir, or do you not?"

Rage seemed to give him a sort of fictitious courage, but he was beside himself with fright in reality.

"General," I replied, with, to him, intolerable composure; "you cannot get a man arrested for violence until after the violence is committed. I have not as yet even demanded an explanation from the baron, and you have not, as yet, the particle of an idea as to how I shall act in the matter. All I

wish to get at, as yet, is an explanation of what is to me an offensive suggestion, namely, that I am a ward under the guardianship of a person who has control over my free will. You are exciting and worrying yourself quite unnecessarily."

"For heaven's sake, for heaven's sake, my dear sir, get rid of this insane intention," whined the general, suddenly changing his tone of rage for one of entreaty, and even going so far as to seize my hands in his. "Just imagine what would come of such action on your part—unpleasantnesses again! Why, think, I ought to behave in a specially careful manner just now, particularly just now. You don't know all the circumstances of the case, you really do not; as soon as we leave this place I shall be delighted to receive you again—I'm obliged to act like this now, but—oh, you must understand, you *must* understand my reasons." He ended by repeating my name in despairing accents two or three times.

I withdrew to the door, assuring him as I went that he need not fear, all should be arranged with the greatest decorum; and so I hurriedly left the room.

Sometimes Russians abroad are dreadfully cowardly and self-conscious, they are always afraid of what people are saying or thinking of them, and doubtful whether such and such a way of acting is correct or not. In a word, they keep themselves strictly under the control of etiquette, especially such as have any pretensions to distinction.

What the Russian abroad specially likes is some model, pre-conceived, which he can stick up once for all and copy with servility, both in the hotels and out walking, at a party, and even on a journey. But here was the general blurting out that he was under the influence of certain special circumstances, and that he was bound to be particularly careful about his proceedings, just now. And this was, of course, the explanation of his sudden ~~seable~~ change of tone towards me. I took good stock of this fact. However, he was quite equal to getting hold of some violence—legal or other—to assist him against me, to-morrow; so I must really be on my guard.

In point of fact, I had no reason to wish to make the general particularly angry; it was Paulina I wanted to enrage. Paulina had behaved so cruelly towards me and had herself impelled me to such a stupid action, that I was most anxious to force her on to her knees, as it were; to make her come and beg me to

desist, of her own accord. My tom-foolery might easily compromise herself before I had done ! Besides, there were other feelings and desires ranging themselves in my brain.

For instance, if I chose to be a nonentity and extinguish myself of my own free will before *her*, she was by no means to infer that I was going to be a nincompoop before other people, or that I was going to allow the baron to use his stick over me. I wished to raise the laugh at all these good people, and come out of the business myself with flying colours. Let them look to themselves !

Paulina would be afraid of a scandal and would very soon whistle me up to her side again ; and if she didn't do that—well, at all events, she should see that I was not a nincompoop.

What curious news ! The nurse whom I have just met on the stairs says that Maria Philipovna, the general's sister, has gone to Karlsbad all alone. She is going to stay with her cousin there. Nurse says she had long intended to go, but how is it no one knew anything about it ? Perhaps it is only I who knew nothing of it. Nurse says that the general and his sister had high words together a day or two ago. I think I understand—it must be about Miss Blanche. Yes, there's something serious in the air.

CHAPTER VII.

IN the morning I called the *keilner* and gave him notice that my bill was to be kept separately.

My room was not such a very expensive one, so that I needn't beat a hasty retreat out of the hotel. I had sixteen *friedrichs d'or*, one hundred and sixty *guldens*, and over there—there were riches to be had. It is a most extraordinary thing that though I haven't won a farthing yet, I act and think and feel as a rich man, and cannot imagine myself anything else.

I determined, in spite of the early hour, to go and look up Mr. Astley at the *Hôtel d'Angleterre*, which was quite close by ;

and was just about to start, when suddenly De Grier appeared. This was a thing which had never happened before, and besides that, the relations between myself and this individual had of late been decidedly strained. He had been in the habit of making no secret of his indifference to all that concerned myself; indeed, he did his best *not* to conceal the fact; while I—well I had my own reasons for disliking him. In a word, I hated the man.

His sudden arrival in my room greatly surprised me: and I immediately made up my mind that there was some special reason for the unusual honour.

He came in with the most amicable air, and paid me a compliment about my room. Seeing that I had my hat in my hand, he observed that surely I wasn't going out so early in the day? Hearing that I was going to see Mr. Astley *on business*, he reflected a moment and his face assumed a very preoccupied expression.

De Grier was, as all Frenchmen are, lively and amiable when those qualities are necessary, or likely to be profitable to themselves, and intolerably dull when the necessity for being amiable and animated is at an end.

A Frenchman is rarely amiable by nature. His amiability is always, as it were, "to order," and in proportion to the demand. For instance, if the Frenchman judges it advisable to be mystical or original, his originality and mysticism are of a most unnatural and silly kind, and cast in some mould which he has long since fixed upon as the correct thing, but which is most old-fashioned and ridiculous.

The natural Frenchman is made up of the most commonplace, petty, everyday positivisms; in a word, he is the very dullest being on the face of the earth.

In my opinion it is only very new hands—young birds—especially young Russian girls, who are ever captivated by the ordinary Frenchman. Every reasonable being very soon sees through, and is disgusted with, his store-house stock of accepted traditional forms of "prepared amiability" and "dried ease of manner" and "salted animation."

"I am here on business," De Grier began, with a careless air, though distinctly courteous, too; "and I do not conceal that I come as the ambassador—or, perhaps, I should call it the intermediary—of the general. As I am so bad a scholar in regard to the Russian language, I hardly understood

anything of what you were saying last night ; but the general has explained to me in detail all you told him, and I confess I—”

“ But, allow me, M. de Grier,” I interrupted. “ You have consented to be an agent in this business ; well, of course, I am nothing but a tutor, you know, and have never made the slightest pretence of being a close friend of this household, or even upon specially intimate terms, and therefore I do not know all the circumstances. Kindly inform me : Do you actually belong to this family as a member ? because you seem to me to take so large a share in everything which concerns them—as, now, for instance, by acting as their intermediary here—that I—”

My question did not seem to please him altogether ; it was too straightforward for him, and he was very anxious to avoid committing himself.

“ There are circumstances which connect me with the general and his affairs—certain, I may say, special circumstances,” he said, drily. “ The general has sent me to request you to put aside your intentions as expressed yesterday. All your ideas were, of course, very clever, but he begged me to tell you that you cannot possibly succeed in the line you wish to take up. Besides, the baron will simply refuse to see you ; and he has every facility for so arranging matters that you shall not have the opportunity of annoying him with any further unpleasantnesses. You must admit the truth of this, yourself. Then, why go on with the matter ? The general promises, for certain, to take you into his household once more at the first convenient opportunity ; and meanwhile he will credit you with your salary and perquisites. Surely, the offer is a pretty good one, isn’t it ? ”

I explained to him with the utmost composure that he was the victim of a slight mistake ; that, in all probability, I should be received and not turned away at the baron’s door—and that my explanation would be listened to. I also required him to acknowledge that he had merely come for the simple purpose of pumping me, in order to find out what I intended to do.

“ Good gracious ! ” he cried, “ surely, since the general is so interested in the matter, we may conclude that he would like to know what you are going to do and how you intend to do it. It is only natural.”

I began to explain to him, while he settled down to listen, all the facts of the case, as I understood it. He made himself comfortable and listened with his face turned side-ways to me and with a most ill-concealed frown upon it. He had a haughty air upon him, too.

I did my best to insist upon the fact that I looked upon this matter from the most serious point of view. I explained that since the baron had carried his complaint against myself to the general, just as though I were the general's servant, he had, therefore, in the first place, deprived me of my situation; and secondly, he had behaved towards me as to an individual who is incapable of answering for himself, or as a person who is not worth speaking to.

Naturally, I felt myself aggrieved.

"However, taking into consideration the difference of age, position in society, and so on, and so on (I could scarcely contain my laughter at this point), I should not take upon myself to demand—or even to suggest—satisfaction.

"At the same time, I none the less consider myself at full liberty, if I please, to offer my apologies to the baroness especially, and to the baron also; the more so as I have really of late felt a very curious fantastical malady upon me, which has upset me a good deal. However, the baron has put me in such a position by his offensive appeal to the general, yesterday, and by his insisting upon my immediate dismissal, that I cannot now apologise to him and the baroness as I should have liked, because both they and all the world will certainly conclude that I have come forward with my apologies simply out of terror, and in the hope of obtaining my situation again.

"From all of which it follows," I continued, "that I am absolutely forced now to demand an apology from the baron first—a most formal apology in set words—for instance, that he had not the slightest intention to offend me. And when the baron has thus expressed his regret I can then come forward freely, and with clean hands and heart, to offer my own apologies to the baron. In a word," I concluded, "all I ask is that the baron shall free my hands."

"Tsu! what peddling refinements! And why should you apologise at all? Now confess, Mr.—Mr.—that you are stirring up this business for the sole purpose of annoying the general! perhaps you may have some special object in view?

Now, my dear Mr.— Mr.— I beg your pardon, I have forgotten your name. Mr. Alexis isn't it?"

"Excuse me, my dear marquis; but what business is that of yours?"

"But the general."

"What about the general? He said, last night, that he had to stand on one leg, or something of the kind, for some reason or other; and he seemed very much alarmed, but I could make nothing of it."

"Yes, you are right, there are certain special circumstances," said De Grier in conciliatory accents, but with more and more show of annoyance. "You know Mademoiselle de Cominges, don't you?"

"Is that Miss Blanche?"

"Yes, Mademoiselle Blanche de Cominges and her mother. Well, you know, I daresay, the general is in love with that lady, and in a word, the wedding will very likely take place here; so that under the circumstances, any unpleasantness or scandal just now—"

"But I don't see any unpleasantness or scandal likely to happen, which could in any way affect the wedding you speak of."

"But the baron is so irascible—a regular Prussian—and he'll be making a Prussian quarrel of it!"

"But that will be my affair, not yours; for I do not belong to the household any longer," I was doing my best to be as dense as possible. "Dear me! so it's settled, is it? that Miss Blanche is to be married to the general? What are they waiting for? What I want to say is, why conceal this from us—from the household, that is?"

"Well, I can't tell you all; it is not quite settled—you see; they are waiting for news from Russia, the general has affairs to settle."

"Ah, yes, granny! of course."

De Grier looked at me with hatred in his eyes.

"In short," he said, "I fully rely on your innate amiability, on your intelligence and on your tact, to do what I ask for the sake of the family into which you were received like a son, in which you were beloved and esteemed."

"But, my dear sir, I was kicked out of it. 'Of course I know' you tell me now that this was only for the look of the thing; but you must confess that if I were to say to you: 'of course I

don't wish to pull your ears, but just for the look of the thing allow me to give them a little pull; it would amount to very much the same thing?"

"If that is the case, if no entreaties have any influence over you," he began, severely and haughtily, "then allow me to inform you that the proper measures will be taken. There is a police-office here; you shall be sent out of the place this very day. The devil! a whipper-snapper like you challenging a man like the baron! And you think you will be left in peace, do you? Let me tell you, nobody is afraid of you here! If I condescended to ask you what I have, it was quite of my own initiative, because you have worried the poor general. And as if you can flatter yourself that the baron will do anything but tell his funkey to kick you out!"

"But, my dear sir, I shall not go in person," I said, with absolute composure; "you are under a delusion, Monsieur de Grier; these sort of things are managed with far more decorum than you seem to suppose. For instance now, I am just off to Mr. Astley's on purpose to ask him to be my agent in the matter, my *second* in fact. Mr. Astley is fond of me and will certainly not refuse my request. He will go to the baron and the baron is sure to receive him. So, that, though I may be a mere tutor and an underling generally, and without particular protection, yet Mr. Astley is the nephew of a lord—a real English lord—and that's a fact known to every one here; besides which his uncle, Lord Pibroch, is on the spot. Believe me, the baron will be extremely polite to Mr. Astley and will listen to all he has to say. If not, then Mr. Astley will take it as a personal insult (you know the English make no bones about that sort of thing), and will send the baron one of his own friends, and Mr. Astley's friends are pretty good people, I assure you. Now then, don't you think things may possibly go a little differently from what you calculated upon?"

The Frenchman was undoubtedly alarmed. All this was certainly very like the truth; and perhaps I really might be in a position to make a nasty business of it.

"Well, I entreat you," he began, in a distinctly beseeching tone, "I entreat you to drop the matter! It looks just as though you *enjoyed* stirring up a scandal. What you want is a good 'row' all round—not satisfaction—you don't really care about satisfaction, do you now? I quite understand. As I

said before, you are very clever and amusing in your treatment of the matter, and very likely you will succeed in what you wish to get at ; but in a word," he concluded, seeing that I had risen from my chair and had taken up my hat, "in a word, I came to give you this note from a certain person ; read it, please ; I am to wait for an answer."

So saying, he took out of his pocket and handed me a little envelope, fastened with a wafer.

The handwriting was Paulina's. I opened it and read :

" It seems to me that you intend to drag this matter on. You are angry, and have begun to play the schoolboy. But there are special circumstances here, which I will perhaps explain to you afterwards ; meanwhile, please stay your hand. What nonsense all this is ! You are necessary to me, and gave me your promise to obey me. Remember Schlangenberg ! I ask you to obey me now, and if necessary, I command you !

"Yours, P.

"P.S.—If you are angry with me about yesterday, please forgive me."

When I read these few lines the letter seemed to dance round and round before my eyes. My lips grew quite white and I commenced trembling.

That damned Frenchman looked as smug as could be, and kept his eyes off me, ostentatiously anxious to avoid being a witness of my confusion. I had rather, far, that he had laughed out loud.

" Very well," I said. " You can tell mademoiselle that she may be quite easy in her mind about the matter.

" Allow me to inquire, though," I added, cuttingly, " how it happened that you were so long about handing me this note ? Instead of talking a lot of nonsense, as you have been doing, it appears to me you would have done better to begin by giving me my letter ; that is if you really held the commission to do so ? "

" Oh, well, I wished—you see all this is so very strange an affair that you must excuse my natural impatience and curiosity to learn at first-hand, or as quickly as I could, what your intentions in the matter might be. Besides, I don't know what the letter contains, and I thought any time would do to deliver it to you."

"Yes, I understand, to put it in as simple a form as possible, you were told to give me the letter as a last resource; and if you could arrange the business verbally, by yourself, you were not to give me the note at all; is that so or not? Tell me the truth, Monsieur de Grier."

"Perhaps," said he, assuming an air of terrible self-restraint, and looking at me with an expression of great significance. I took my hat; he bent his head slightly, and went out. It appeared to me that there was an ironical smile on his lips; indeed, how could it be otherwise?

"All right,—we shall settle accounts yet, my little French bantam. We shall find an opportunity of trying our spurs together," I muttered, as I went downstairs. I could not collect my thoughts as yet—I felt just as though I had had a violent blow over the temple. The fresh air did me some good.

In a couple of minutes or so, as soon as I could think clearly—or more or less clearly—once more, two ideas impressed themselves upon me. The first was, how strange that out of such a pack of nonsense, out of a mischievous school boy freak and a few words of tom-foolery said by me last night on the spur of the moment, such a general commotion as this should arise; and the second thought was, what is the influence that this Frenchman has over Paulina? Apparently he need but say the word, and she does all he requires, even so far as to write to me and *entreat* me.

Of course I have only been able to guess at their relations from the very first—since the day I earliest saw and knew them; but for the last few days especially, I have observed a sort of decided repugnance in her towards him—contempt, even; while as for him he has not even looked at her, so absolutely wanting in ordinary politeness to her has he been.

I have observed this clearly, and Paulina herself told me of her loathing for him; for some reason or other she had felt impelled to make the confession—the fact is, he has her under his thumb; she is in his net somehow.

CHAPTER VIII

ON the promenade, as it is called, in the chesnut avenue, I met my friend the Englishman.

"Ah!" he began, on observing me, "I was just coming to see you, and perhaps you were on your way to see me. So you have parted with your friends?"

"Tell me, first, how on earth do you know it?" I asked with surprise. "Surely you don't know all about it already? has everybody heard about it?"

"Oh, no! not everybody, and there is no necessity for anyone hearing of it; no one is talking of it yet."

"Then how do you happen to know?"

"Oh, I know—I have had an opportunity of hearing about it. Now, where are you going to from here? I am fond of you and that's why I was coming to look you up."

"You are a good fellow, Mr. Astley," I said. (Meanwhile I was amazed at his having heard of my escapades. Who could have told him?) "And as I haven't had my coffee as yet, and as you can't have had much, let us go and have our breakfast in the Vauxhall, then we can sit and smoke and I'll tell you all about it, and you must unbosom yourself a little, too."

The restaurant was only a hundred yards or so away. They brought us our coffee, I lit my cigarette and settled down comfortably. Mr. Astley did not smoke, but he sat and waited for me to begin speaking.

"I shall not go at all—I shall stay here," I said.

"I felt sure you would remain," replied Astley approvingly.

When I set out to go to Mr. Astley's just now I had not the slightest intention—in fact I had decided upon ~~not~~ telling him anything about my love for Paulina. All these days I had hardly said a single word to him on that subject, while he was very reserved ~~on~~ all occasions. From the first time I saw him I observed how strong an impression Paulina had made upon him, but he never even so much as mentioned her name. And yet strangely enough now, hardly had he sat down and settled himself to listen, with his gaze intently fixed on me, than I suddenly felt the strongest desire possible to tell him everything, that is, all my love and all the shady side of the business.

I went on and on for half an hour, and it was the most delightful sensation to me, to unburden my bosom then, for the first time in my life. I observed that at some portions of my narrative, especially where I dwelt on the fiery, ardent nature of my love, Mr. Astley was considerably confused; and I therefore insisted particularly upon this trait, and dwelt on it more than I should otherwise have done. I confess, I think I said something unnecessary about the Frenchman.

Mr. Astley listened, seated opposite to me, motionless, and without a word or a sound; he looked me straight in the eyes the whole time. But when I mentioned the Frenchman he stopped me suddenly and asked me whether I had any right to drag extraneous circumstances into my personal narrative? Mr. Astley always had a very sudden way of dropping down upon one with his questions.

"You are right, I'm afraid not!" I replied.

"You cannot do more than suggest anything with regard to Miss Paulina and this Frenchman? You are not in a position to make positive assertions?"

Once more I felt amazed at such categorical enquiries from so very reserved a man as Mr. Astley.

"No, nothing positive," I said; "of course not."

"Then you are very wrong indeed, not only to speak of such a thing to me, but even to harbour such thoughts in your own secret heart."

"Very well, very well; I admit it, I know it; but never mind that now," I cried, interrupting him, and wondering at myself.

I then told him all about yesterday's adventure in its full details. I told him of Paulina's suggestion, of my escapade with the baron, of my dismissal, of the general's unusual state of alarm and anxiety; and, lastly, I described minutely De Grier's visit of this morning, ending by showing Mr. Astley Paulina's note.

"What do you make of all this?" I asked him. "I came over on purpose to hear your opinion on the matter. As far as I am concerned, I think I should have the greatest satisfaction in killing this Frenchman; and very likely I shall do it, too, some day."

"As for me," began Mr. Astley;—"so far as concerns Miss Paulina—well, you know very well that we are sometimes obliged to have relations with people who are hate.

ful to us, if there be a necessity for these relations. There may be relations, in this instance, of which you have no idea whatever, depending upon some outside circumstances of which you know nothing. I think you may fairly be easy about the matter; comparatively so, of course. With regard to her action of yesterday, it was strange, no doubt. I don't mean, it was strange that she wished to get rid of you, and sent you under the Baron's walking-stick. (I cannot understand why he didn't use it, since he had it in his hand); but because such conduct, in so charming a young lady, is—well indecorous. Of course she never dreamt that you would carry out her ironical commands."

"Do you know what?" I cried suddenly, staring intently at him: "I believe you have heard all this before, and do you know from whom? from Miss Paulina herself."

Mr. Astley looked at me with surprise. "Your eyes are flashing and I read suspicion in them," he said, immediately regaining his composure; "but you haven't the slightest right to express that suspicion aloud. I, at all events, do not admit your right, and therefore I absolutely refuse to answer your question."

"Very well—enough,—you needn't!" I cried, greatly agitated and not in the least aware why this particular idea had struck me.

And how, when, where could Paulina have got hold of Mr. Astley and selected him for her confidence? I certainly had lost sight of Mr. Astley, a little, of late; and Paulina herself always had been a riddle to me,—so much so that now, while telling Mr. Astley the whole story of my love for Paulina, I had been struck, even as I spoke, with the fact that I could hardly tell him anything positive or definite as to my relations with her; on the contrary, it all seemed strange, and fantastical, and a baseless sort of fabrication altogether.

"Very well, very well!" I said—"I'm quite wrong, I know; but there's a great deal I cannot account for, just now," I cried, almost panting in my agitation. "But you are a good fellow all the same. Now then, there's another matter, and I want, not your advice, but your opinion."

I waited a moment and then began again: "Why do you suppose the old general was so frightened? Why do you think that they were all so fluttered by my most absurd tom-foolery? Such a rumpus did they kick up that even De Grier must

needs have a share in it (and he only joins in when affairs are critical, or at least, very important), and pays *me* a visit—a fellow like me; and begged me, and entreated me; *he*, De Grier, entreated *me*! Then, observe, he came before nine o'clock in the morning, and yet Paulina's letter was in his hands. When can it have been written? that is the question. Perhaps they had to awake Paulina on purpose for it. Therefore what I say is this—that Paulina is his slave (for she can even beg *my* pardon at his instigation); besides which, what has *she*, she personally, to do with the matter? Why is *she* interested in it? Why are they all so frightened of this baron? and what has the general's marriage with Blanche de Cominges to do with it? They say they have to be especially on their good behaviour in consequence of this project; but surely they are carrying this *especially* careful behaviour a little too far; don't you agree with me? What do you think? I can see it in your eyes that you know more than I do about this affair, too."

Mr. Astley laughed and nodded his head. "I certainly do know more about it than you do, I think," he said. "Miss Blanche is the sole key to the position, and that is the absolute truth, I am convinced of it."

"Well, but what about Miss Blanche?" I cried impatiently. I suddenly became aware of a hope that something regarding Paulina was now to come out.

"I have reason to believe that Miss Blanche has special and adequate reasons for desiring, at all hazards, to avoid meeting this baron and baroness; the meeting would be decidedly unpleasant, if it didn't lead to absolute scandal."

"Oh—surely not!"

"Miss Blanche was here at Roulettenberg a couple of years ago, during the season. I was here too. Miss Blanche did not call herself 'de Cominges,' and her mother, the present Madame Veuve de Cominges, did not then exist at all. At all events there was no mention of her. De Grier, too, was not De Grier then. I feel the profoundest conviction—not only that he and Miss Blanche are not cousins,—but that their acquaintance is only of very recent date. De Grier has not long been a marquis; I know that for a fact, thanks to certain circumstances. You may also take it as proved that his name of De Grier is of recent manufacture. I know a man here who knew him under another name."

"But he has a circle of distinctly respectable friends!"

"Oh, that's very likely! even Miss Blanche may have that much. And yet Miss Blanche, a couple of years since, received a polite notice from the police, here, to leave the town (at the instigation of this same baroness), and she had to clear out."

"Why so?"

"She appeared here then, first of all, with some Italian—a prince with a historical name, Barberini, or something like that—a fellow all over rings and diamonds, not sham ones either. They drove about in a marvellous turn-out. Miss Blanche used to play *trente-et-quarante* and had good luck at first; then her luck changed for the worse, so far as I can remember. I recollect, one evening she lost some huge sums.

"But the worst of it was, that one fine morning her prince disappeared altogether; and the carriage and horses disappeared too, and so did everything else. The prince's bill at the hotel was enormous. Mademoiselle Zelma (she had suddenly become Zelma instead of Barberini) was in the lowest depths of despair. She went whining and groaning all over the hotel, and tore her dress to pieces in her madness.

"There happened to be a Pole staying at the hotel (a Polish count, all travelling Poles are counts!) and Miss Zelma, tearing her dress and scratching her face like a cat with her beautiful scent-washed hands, made a distinct impression upon this gentleman. They talked matters over, and by dinner-time she was feeling decidedly calmer and much consoled. In the evening the pair turned up at the Vauxhall, arm-in-arm. Miss Zelma laughed loud as she usually did, and her manners seemed a little more free and easy than before. She joined that circle of ladies at the roulette-table who are in the habit of making their way to the board by elbowing out some other player and taking his place. This is a very common fashion among a certain set; you must have observed it?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Well, then, it's no use remarking upon it. To the annoyance of the respectable public they are not kept in order; at all events not such of them as can change a thousand-franc note at the office every day; as soon, however, as they are no longer in a position to change a daily thousand-franc note, they are politely asked to quit.

"Miss Zelma continued to change her notes every day ; but her play became more and more unlucky. You must have observed that this class of ladies generally play with extraordinary lucky results, the reason being that they have so wonderful a control over themselves. However, my story is just about finished. The count disappeared, precisely as the prince had done before him. Miss Zelma turned up in the evening to play all alone ; there was no one to give her an arm. In a couple of days she had lost every farthing she had. Having staked her last gold piece and lost it, she looked round the table and observed Baron Warmerholm sitting next to her and glaring at her with a fixed look of wrath and indignation. But Miss Zelma did not remark the tendency of his gaze, and coming up to him with one of her sweetest smiles, she begged him to stake ten louis d'or for her account on the 'red' In consequence of this request she received an intimation the same evening, at the baroness's instigation, that she was to appear no more at the Vauxhall.

"If you are surprised that I know all these little details—by no means decorous some of them—I may explain that I learned the whole story from a relative of my own, a Mr. Feeder, who took Miss Zelma away the same evening, in his own carriage, from Roulettenberg to Spa. Now, you must understand, Miss Blanche is anxious to be Mrs. General, probably in order that she may not be liable, in future, to polite requests to make herself scarce—as two years ago. She does not gamble now : but she has money and lends it to those who *do* gamble, at high interest. It is a much better business. I have an idea that the wretched old general is a debtor to her ; perhaps De Grier is too, or De Grier may be a partner. At all events you will easily understand that she is anxious to keep out of the baroness's way till after her marriage ; because, to put it shortly—a scandal just now would not pay. You are connected with their household and therefore your actions might lead to such a scandal, especially as Miss Blanche appears in public every day arm-in-arm with the general or with Miss Paulina. Do you understand the matter better now?"

"No, I do *not*!" I cried, striking the table so energetically that a waiter ran up in alarm.

"Tell me, Mr. Asley," I continued, beside myself, "since you know all this history, and consequently must understand very well indeed, *what* Miss Blanche de Cominges is, why is it

that you did not warn me of that fact? or the general at all events? or above all Miss Paulina, who has shown herself in public here in the Vauxhall with Miss Blanche arm-in-arm? How could you leave us all in the dark about it?"

"There was no object in warning you because you could have done nothing," replied Astley with his usual composure. "Besides, what was there to warn you of? Probably the general knows all about Miss Blanche a good deal better than I do myself, and yet he trots her about the place in company with Miss Paulina. The general is an unhappy man. I saw them yesterday out riding, Miss Blanche on ahead with De Grier and that little Russian prince, on beautiful horses, and the old general trotting along in their rear on a chestnut; he had complained of his legs aching in the morning, but he had a very good seat for all that. Well, at that moment the idea struck me that the general was a ruined man! However, all this is no affair of mine; and I have only lately had the honour of making Miss Paulina's acquaintance. And besides," said Mr. Astley warmly, all of a sudden, "I do not recognise your right to ask me any questions—in spite of my sincere regard for you—"

"Enough, enough!" I exclaimed, rising. "I understand now, as clearly as daylight, that Paulina knows all about Miss Blanche, but that she cannot break with her Frenchman, and therefore she is obliged to walk about and associate with Miss Blanche. Believe me, no other influence could induce her to associate thus with such a woman, and to condescend to write me a letter of entreaty to leave the baron alone. This is the influence before which everything else must go down. And yet it was she herself who set me at the baron. The deuce only knows what to make of it! I can't see head or tail in it."

"You forget that this Miss Blanche de Cominges is the general's betrothed, and that Paulina—the step-daughter of the general—has got a little brother and sister who are the general's own children, but who are entirely deserted by that old lunatic, and robbed too, I think."

"Yes, yes, you are right; that is so. To leave the children and go away would amount to throwing them over altogether; while to remain is to watch their interests and perhaps even to save a few remnants of their property. Yes, yes, it's quite true; and I understand now why they are all so deeply interested in granny."

"In whom?" asked Mr. Astley

"In that old lady at Moscow who will not die, and as to whose death they expect a telegram every moment."

"Yes, of course, all the interest centres in her. It is entirely a matter of inheritance. Let the general show his money and he marries at once. Miss Paulina will be released too; as for De Grier—"

"Well, go on—De Grier?"

"De Grier will be paid his money, and that's all he is waiting for here."

"Do you really think he is only waiting for that?"

"I know of nothing else," said Astley stubbornly.

"Well, I do then! I do!" I repeated warmly. "He too is waiting for his legacy, for Paulina will have one, and the instant she gets her money she will throw herself on his neck. All women are like that. And the prouder they are the more absolutely do they permit themselves to be enslaved. Paulina's nature is to love passionately and nothing more. There, that's my opinion of her; she is good for nothing but passionate love. Observe her carefully when she is sitting alone, thinking; why, she looks like one fore-destined to everything accursed and damnable in the world. She is born for horror and all the miseries and passions of this life; she is—but who's that calling me?" I cried suddenly. "Who's calling me? I heard somebody shout in Russian; it was a woman's voice calling me by my name—listen, listen!"

We were coming near to my hotel at this moment; for we had left the restaurant some time ago, though neither of us noticed the fact.

"I heard a woman's voice calling for someone, but I could not understand whom she wanted, as it was in Russian. I see now where the shouting came from." Mr. Astley pointed out the place. "There, it's that old woman in the large armchair which such a host of servants have just carried up the steps. There are a number of her portmanteaus being brought along behind, so the train must have this moment arrived."

"But why should she be calling to me? There she goes again—and look there, she's beckoning to us with her hand!"

"I see she is," said Mr. Astley.

"Alexey Ivanovitch! Alexey Ivanovitch! Good heavens! he's as deaf as a post," came, in despairing tones, from the steps of the hotel.

We almost ran to the spot. I stepped on to the balcony, and—my hands dropped with amazement, and my feet remained glued to the stones.

CHAPTER IX.

ON the landing of the wide stone steps leading to the hotel, up to which spot she had been carried in an arm-chair; surrounded by hosts of servants, maids, and functionaries of the hotel; in the presence of the great oberkellner himself, who had darted out of his lair in order to meet the visitor who arrived with so much noisy pomp and circumstance; and accompanied by her own maid and man and so many band-boxes, and trunks sat—*granny*. Yes, it was her own identical self, stern and rich and seventy-five years old, Antonida Vassilievna Tarrasevitchova, *grande dame* of Moscow—the identical *granny* about whom so many telegrams had been sent, and received—the dying, but never dead, *granny*, who had thus turned up among us in *propria persona*, dropping down upon us as quietly and unexpectedly as snow-flakes on one's head. She appeared, as usual, lively and animated, in spite of the fact that she could not walk a step and was carried everywhere in her big arm-chair, and had been so for, at least, five years. She was just the same as ever, upright, arbitrary, continually ordering somebody about noisily, and pitching into everybody all round; not a whit altered since the day I first saw her after entering the general's service as tutor.

Naturally, I stood before her fixed to the spot with amazement. She had detected me with her *lynx* eye a hundred yards off, while they were carrying her in on her arm-chair, and recognizing me at once had called out to me by my name, which she had not forgotten; to be told it once was to know it for ever, in her case.

"And they expected to be able to pop a woman like this into her coffin and divide the spoil," I thought to myself. "Why, she'll outlive all of us and the whole hotel, too. But, goodness gracious, what will become of all our good people,

now? What will the old general do? She'll set the whole hotel upside down in no time."

"Well, my lad, what are you standing there for with your eyes starting out of your head?" cried the old woman to me: "don't you know how to bow and say 'how d'ye do?' or are you too proud? or, perhaps, you haven't recognized me yet? do you hear, Potapitch?" she cried, addressing her old manservant who stood by in a dress coat and white tie, and who had accompanied her on her travels. "Do you hear? he doesn't recognize me. You see, I'm buried—that's what it is. They sent telegram after telegram—'is she dead yet? is she dead yet?' I know all about it, you see; and, as you may perceive, I'm all alive-oh! after all."

"I'm sure I beg your pardon, Antonida Vassilievna," I cried. "Why should not I recognize you? I was only astonished—and how should I not be surprised at such an unexpected apparition?"

"Why, what's there surprising about it? I sat down in a railway carriage, and came along. It was quite comfortable and quiet. I liked it. Well, what have you been doing? Have you just been out for a walk?"

"Yes. Just as far as the Vauxhall."

"It's nice enough here," said granny, looking round; "it's warm and comfortable, and the trees seem very fine. I like all that sort of thing. Are our people at home—the general and all?"

"Oh, I should think so. At this early hour they are pretty sure to be at home."

"Oh, it's all done by clockwork, here, is it? They are pleased to be fashionable. I hear they keep a carriage, too, these Russian *Seigneurs*. They are having a bit of a flare out abroad! And Paulina, is she here, too?"

"Yes, she's here."

"And the Frenchman? However, I shall see them all for myself. Now then, Alexey Ivanovitch, show me the way, straight to the general's apartments. Well, and how do you like being here?"

"Oh, so-so."

"Look here, Potapitch, just you tell this lout here, the kellner, to let us have good rooms, not too high up, and they must be comfortable, and take all the luggage there at once. Now, look here, I don't want all this crowd of people to carry

my chair. What a slavish set they are. What do they all come buzzing around me for?—Who's that with you?" she addressed me again.

"This is Mr. Astley," I said.

"And who is Mr. Astley?"

"A traveller, and my good friend; he knows the general, too."

"An Englishman, I can see, by the way he looks at me with his teeth set. Well, I like the English. Come, now, you people, carry me upstairs—take me straight to the general's rooms; whereabouts are they?"

Granny was carried off. I went on ahead, up the wide staircase of the hotel. Our progress was very effective; everyone who met us stopped and stared at us with both his eyes. This hotel is considered the best and the dearest and the most aristocratic in the place. On the stairs and in the corridors one is always meeting smart people and aristocratic English ladies; and a great many of these, on this occasion, stopped at the bottom and inquired all about us of the oberkellner, who, in his turn, was greatly struck with granny's state and grandeur. Of course, he informed all inquirers that this was a great foreign lady, a Russian countess, *grande dame*, and so on: and that she was to occupy the same rooms that the Grand-Duchess N. lived in last week. The arbitrary-looking and commanding exterior of granny, and the fact of her being carried about in an arm-chair, were the cause of the striking effect she made. On meeting each new person, she would immediately measure them from head to foot with her inquisitive gaze, and ask me aloud who they were. Granny belonged to the class of big women; and though never seen out of her chair, you could not help knowing, to look at her, that she must be very tall; her back was as straight as a board, and she always sat upright in her chair. Her large grey head, with its sharp features—large also—was always held well up; and she looked about her proudly and as it were challenging the world. It was clear at a glance that these characteristics were perfectly natural to her.

In spite of her seventy-five years, her face was still fresh, even her teeth had not suffered much. She was dressed in a black silk gown, and had a white cap on her head.

"She interests me wonderfully," said Astley, coming up close to me.

"She knows about the telegrams," I thought to myself; "and she knows all about De Grier, too. But I don't think she has heard anything about Miss Blanche yet; or very little." I communicated my ideas to Mr. Astley.

What a wicked fellow I must be.* No sooner was my surprise at first seeing granny, over, than I felt the wildest delight to think of the thunder-clap which we were about to deal in the general's apartments. I felt intoxicated with the glorious fun of the idea, and went on ahead as happy as a king. Our people were up in the third storey. I did not announce our arrival or even knock at the door, but simply threw it wide open, and granny was carried in, in all her triumph. They were all assembled, as though purposely, in the general's study. It was just twelve o'clock, and I think they were engaged in arranging for some sort of a picnic. Some of them were to go in carriages, and some on horseback; anyhow, they were all going, and had invited friends as well. Besides the general, Paulina and the children, and the nurse, there were, at this moment, in the room, De Grier, Miss Blanche in a riding habit, her mother Madame Veuve de Cominges, the little prince, and some travelling German professor whom I had never seen before. Granny's chair was deposited in the middle of the room, about three paces from the general.

My goodness! I shall never forget the impressive effect of her entrée. When we opened the door, the general had just been relating something or other, and De Grier was correcting him. I must here remark that, for the last two or three days, both De Grier and Miss Blanche had been wonderfully polite to the little prince, in the very teeth of the poor old general; and just at this moment the party were certainly in high good humour, and though, probably, the whole thing was artificial, yet they seemed to be a very happy family-party.

At sight of granny the general seemed suddenly to petrify in his place; his mouth opened wide, and there he sat with his half uttered words unspoken. He stared at her, with his eyes starting out of his head, as though under the fascination of a snake's gaze. Granny looked at him, too, silently and motionless, but there was a most perfect combination of triumph and irony and defiance in her eyes. So they sat and stared at one another for the space of at least ten seconds, amid the solemn silence of all around them. De Grier first of all looked polite, and then distinctly and decidedly uncom-

fortable. Miss Blanche elevated her eyebrows, opened her mouth and looked insolently at granny. The prince and the German gazed at the picture with the deepest possible expression of incomprehension on their faces. In Paulina's eyes I read extreme astonishment and bewilderment; but suddenly she grew as pale as her handkerchief, and then the blood rushed back all over her cheeks and neck and forehead. Indeed, it was a catastrophe for all parties. I had quite enough to do to look backwards and forwards at granny and the others, over and over again; while Mr. Astley stood, as usual, composed and gentlemanly, and aloof.

"Well, here I am, you see, instead of a telegram!" said granny at last, breaking the silence; "you hardly expected me, did you?"

"Antonida Vassilievna! Aunty! by what manner of means—" murmured the unfortunate general. I believe he would have had a stroke if granny had delayed speaking many more seconds.

"Eh? What? why, I simply took my seat in the train and came along. What do you suppose the railways are there for? And you all thought I had stretched myself out full length for good and all, and had left you my money, did you? Oh, I know all about the telegrams you kept sending from here. You must have spent a fortune over them. You don't send them for nothing at this distance. So I just girded up my loins, and came along to save any more expense. This is that same Frenchman, Monsieur de Grier, isn't it?"

"*Oui, Madame!*" began De Grier. "And believe me, I am enchanted—your health, it's a miracle; and what a charming surprise, to see you here!"

"Oh, yes! charming of course. I know you, my man. You're a humbug, that's what you are. I don't trust you *that* much," and granny showed him her little finger. "Who's that?" she asked, pointing to Miss Blanche. The striking French girl, in the riding habit and with her little whip in her hand, had evidently made an impression upon her. "Does she belong to the place?"

"That is Mademoiselle Blanche de Cominges; and this is her mother, Madame Veuve de Cominges. They are staying in this hotel," I explained.

"Is the daughter married?" asked granny unceremoniously.

"Miss de Cominges is not married," I replied as courteously as possible, and only half aloud.

"Is she lively?"

I pretended not to understand the question.

"She isn't dull, is she? She doesn't understand Russian, I suppose? Here's De Grier now, *he* floundered a little in our language at Moscow; he could actually count from five to ten, I think."

I explained that Miss Blanche had never been in Russia.

"*Bon jour!*" said granny suddenly, turning abruptly to Miss Blanche.

"*Bon jour, Madame!*" said Miss Blanche, courteously and with grace, and doing her best to hide all expression of the astonishment which granny's questions about herself, and now her sudden address, awoke in her.

"Oho! she casts her eyes down, she has her little tricks and manners; one can see at a glance what sort of a bird this is; she's an actress or something of that sort. I've taken rooms down below here, in the hotel," she continued to the general; "I shall be your neighbour; are you glad or not?"

"Oh, aunty, do believe how truly delighted I am!" said the general, in hesitating accents. He had recovered himself now, and as he could be courteous and very gentlemanly in his manners when he pleased, he now set himself to appear at his best. "We were so overwhelmed and saddened by the news of your illness. We have been receiving such hopeless telegrams about you, and now, suddenly—"

"Oh, bosh, bosh!" interrupted granny, "that's humbug."

"But how," interrupted the general hurriedly, and anxious not to notice the expression "bosh," hurled at him by granny—"however did you make up your mind to such a journey as this? You must allow that at your age, and in your present state of health—it really came so unexpectedly upon us, that our astonishment was not unnatural. But I am *so* glad, and we shall all, I'm sure" (here he smiled solemnly but with great amiability), "do our very utmost to render your stay here a most agreeable experience to you."

"Well, that's enough; you are only talking nonsense, as usual. I can make myself quite happy *by* myself, thank you. However, I don't mind your assisting me; I don't think you have ever done me much injury. How did I come, you ask? Why, what is there surprising about the matter? It's a very

simple thing altogether ; and why are all these people so surprised ? How are you, Paulina ? What are you doing with yourself here ? ”

“ How d’ye do, granny ? ” said Paulina, approaching her ; “ how long have you been on the journey ? ”

“ There, she’s a sensible girl, now ; she asks me a sensible question ; all you people do nothing but say ‘ Ach ! ’ and ‘ Ach ! ’ Well this is how it was : I lay and lay in bed, and the doctors fussed and worried over me. So I kicked them all out, and sent for a little quack fellow who had cured another old woman like me, with some hay-seed stuff or other. Well, it did me good too ; next day I burst into a violent perspiration, and then I got up. Then all the German doctors came back, and put on their spectacles, and began fussing over me again, and they said—‘ Now then, if you can go abroad and take the waters, you’ll be all right.’ And why shouldn’t I ? I thought to myself. My friends were astonished out of their wits when I told them. ‘ You’ll never get there,’ they said. Think of that now. However, that was one day, and the next I took my maid and this fellow Potápitch, and Feodor the butler. I sent Feodor back from Berlin because I saw I did not want him a bit. I could have come all alone, for that matter. I always take a saloon carriage, and there are lots of porters at all the stations ; for sixpence they’d carry you all over the place.

“ My word, what smart rooms you have taken ! ” she continued, looking round. “ Where did you get the money from ? Why, all your property is pawned long ago. I should like to know how much you owe this Frenchman alone. Oh I know all about it, my good sir ; I know all about it.”

“ Aunty,” began the general in confusion, “ I—I am surprised, aunty—surely I can look after my own affairs without control—besides, my expenses do not exceed my means, and we are here—”

“ Oho ! they don’t exceed your means, don’t they ? dear me ! I suppose you’ve grabbed the last farthing of your children’s money too—eh ? honest guardian that you are ! ”

“ After that—after such words,” cried the general wrathfully—“ I—I—really don’t know—”

“ Of course you don’t know ; you can’t leave the roulette-tables, I suppose ; haven’t you whisked all your money away yet ? ”

The general was so amazed that he almost choked with the surging flood of injured feelings which overwhelmed him.

"The roulette-tables, I? a man of my weight and position? Recollect yourself, aunt, you must be ill—"

"Oh, bosh! humbug! I know all about it; you can't be dragged away from the gambling board; you always lie about everything. I want to have a look at that roulette-table this very day. Paulina, you must tell me all about what there is to see here, and you too, Alexey Ivanovitch, you must show me round a bit; and you Potápitch, make a note of all the places to be seen about here. What is there to go and look at?" she suddenly inquired of Paulina once more.

"Oh, there are some ruins, near; then there's the Schlangenberg."

"What's the Schlangenberg, a forest?"

"No, not a forest; it's a hill; and there's a '*Point*' on it."

"And what may a '*Point*' be?"

"The highest spot on the hill, a railed-in place, whence there is an unequalled view."

"Yes, but how about dragging my chair up? will they be able to carry it up?"

"Oh, yes," I replied; "we'll find plenty of porters." At this moment the nurse came up to greet granny, and brought the children to say "how d'ye do."

"Come, come, we needn't kiss," said granny; "I hate kissing children—they are always so slobbery. And how are you, nurse?"

Nurse said that she was very happy here and liked the place exceedingly, and added that we had all made ourselves very miserable over granny's illness.

"Oh, I know, I know—you're a simple old soul," remarked granny. "Who are all these people, are they all guests, or what?" she asked Paulina; "who's that wretched little mortal in spectacles?"

"Prince Nilsky, granny," whispered Paulina.

"Oh, a Russian? and I thought he wouldn't understand what I said! Well, let's hope he didn't hear then. I've seen Mr. Astley already—why, here he is again"—she had just caught sight of him—"How d'ye do, sir?" she added, turning to him.

Mr. Astley bowed politely, but said nothing.

"Well, haven't you got anything to say to me? Tell me something interesting; come, translate that for him, Paulina."

Paulina interpreted.

"May I say, then, that I am extremely pleased to see you here, and am delighted to observe that your health is so far good that you have been enabled to undertake the journey," replied Astley seriously, but with great readiness.

This answer was interpreted for granny's benefit, and she was evidently exceedingly pleased by it.

"How well Englishmen always answer," she remarked. "I have always been very partial to the English, there is no comparison between them and Frenchmen."

"Come and see me, will you?" she added to Mr. Astley; "I shall try not to be too dull company for you; translate this for him, and tell him that I am staying here, down below, downstairs, you know, *downstairs*," she repeated to Mr. Astley, pointing downwards with her finger.

Mr. Astley seemed delighted with the invitation.

Granny next proceeded to examine Paulina from head to foot, with attentive but apparently well satisfied gaze.

"I should love you, you know, Paulina," she said suddenly; "I should like you very much, for you are a good girl, far the best of the lot; but your temper—ugh! however I've got a baddish temper myself—just turn round a minute! Is that false hair, stuck on there, behind?"

"No, granny, my own."

"That's well, that's well. I don't like the present silly fashion; do you know, you are very pretty. I should certainly fall in love with you if I were a gentleman. Why don't you marry? Well, well, I must be going. I want to get out a bit. I've been having nothing but railway carriages for so long. Well, are you still angry?" she asked the general, all of a sudden.

"Not at all, not at all, aunt," said the general, encouraged by her more conciliatory manner; "not at all; of course I understand that, at your age—"

"This old woman is in her second childhood," whispered De Grier to me.

"I want to look about me a bit, here," continued granny to the general; "will you lend me Alexey Ivanovitch for a little?"

"Oh, of course, as long as you like; but I myself, and Paulina, and Monsieur de Grier, in fact all of us, we should all esteem it the greatest of pleasures to be allowed to accompany you about."

"But, madame, it will give us the sincerest happiness," added De Grier, with a most bewitching smile.

"Yes, yes, of course. Happiness, I understand all that—you amuse me, my good man. However," she added to the general, suddenly, "I'm not going to give you any money. Come now, I must just go and have a look at the apartments they've given to me, and then we'll go and see the sights. Now then, lift me up." Granny's chair was raised once more and the procession proceeded slowly downstairs again.

The general moved along as though stunned by a blow on the head. De Grier was thinking over something very profoundly.

Miss Blanche was about to remain behind, but for some reason or other she changed her mind and decided to go with the rest. The prince immediately followed her, and there only remained upstairs Madame Veuve de Cominges and the German professor.

CHAPTER X.

AT watering places, and I think all over Europe too, the managers of hotels and oberkellners, when apportioning apartments to their visitors, do so, not so much in accordance with the visitor's own expressed requests or wishes, as with their own private estimate of the rank of each individual; and I must say they rarely make a mistake.

But in granny's case, they gave her such stupendously magnificent rooms that they rather outdid themselves for once. There were four beautifully furnished rooms, a bath room, bed-rooms for servants, a place for the man, and so on.

It was quite true that a grand duchess had put up in these very rooms a week before, and, of course, the oberkellner lost no time in telling the new occupant all about it, in order to furnish an excuse for adding still more to the price of the suite. Granny was carried—or rather wheeled—through all the rooms, and she carefully and severely examined them. The oberkellner, an elderly man with a bald head, escorted her round with great gravity and courtesy. I don't know whom he took granny for; but anyhow it must have been for some very exalted—and especially, very rich personage indeed. She

was entered in the visitors' book, immediately she arrived, as "*Madame la Générale, Princesse de Tarrassevitchova*," although granny had no claim to the title of princess. Her maid and servant, her special carriage in the train, her quantities of useless luggage—portmanteaus and even trunks—probably all contributed to the first blast of prestige; and the arm-chair, the arbitrary tone and voice and eccentric questions—in fact, the whole presence and behaviour of granny, completed her claim to the universal respect which was paid to her. During her tour of inspection, granny would occasionally stop her bearers, and pointing to some piece of furniture, would put a question to the placidly smiling and polite oberkellner, who was rapidly becoming more and more frightened of granny.

Granny spoke to him in French, but her French was so bad that I invariably had to repeat what she said. The oberkellner's replies generally displeased her, and were unsatisfactory altogether, she thought. I must say her questions were enough to puzzle anybody. For instance, she would stop her chair suddenly opposite some picture or other—a wretched copy of a well-known original, on a mythological subject:

"Whose portrait is that?"

Oberkellner replied that it was probably that of some countess.

"Why don't you know? Fancy living here and not knowing that! What is the good of this fellow? Why does he squint like that?"

The oberkellner could not answer that kind of question satisfactorily, and was covered with confusion.

"What a fool he is!" remarked granny in Russian.

She was taken a little further. The same kind of thing happened again with reference to a Saxon statuette, which granny stared at for a long while, and then had turned out of the room, goodness knows why.

At last she asked the oberkellner how much the carpets in her bedroom cost, and where they were made? The oberkellner promised to find out.

"What asses they all are!" she observed; and commenced to examine her bed very minutely. "What a pompous looking thing," she said, "turn it down." The bed clothes were turned down. "More, more; turn it all down. Take off the pillows and pillow-cases, and lift up the mattress." The whole bed was pulled to pieces. Granny examined it all over, most care-

fully. "Ha! well, it's a good thing there are no bugs at all events! Now then, off with the linen. Put my own sheets and pillows on instead. This is all much too sumptuous for me, you know. What's the good of giving an old woman like me such rooms as these? I shall be dull here all alone. Alexey Ivanovitch, you must come and see me very often, when you have finished the children's lessons."

"I have left the general's service since yesterday," I said. "I am living in the hotel now entirely on my own account."

"Why so?"

"Well, a few days since an eminent German baron arrived here, with his wife the baroness, from Berlin; and yesterday I spoke to them in German when they were out strolling in the park, and could not resist indulging in the Berlin accent."

"Well, and what of that?"

"He considered it an insult and complained to the general; so the general turned me off yesterday."

"Why, did you swear at this baron fellow, or what? (If you *had* sworn it would have been all the better.)"

"Oh, dear no! on the contrary, the baron raised his stick to me."

"What?—and you, you sniveller, you allowed him to behave like that to your tutor?" She turned round sharply and addressed the poor general: "And you kick him out of the house besides? Muffs—you are a set of muffs—that's what you are."

"Oh, don't put yourself out about me, thanks, aunt," said the general, frowning. "I can manage my own affairs quite satisfactorily without assistance; and, besides, Alexey Ivanovitch did not tell you the story quite correctly."

"And you, did you simply grin and bear it?" she asked me.

"I wanted to challenge the baron to a duel," I said, as modestly and composedly as I could, "but the general opposed it."

"What did you oppose it for?" she cried, turning round at the general again. ("You'd better go away and come back when you're called," she added to the oberkellner, "and don't stand gaping there with your mouth open. I can't bear that dolt.")

The oberkellner bowed and left the room. Of course he had not understood the old lady's complimentary allusion to himself.

"Why, my dear aunt ! as if duels can be permitted !" said the general, with a derisive smile.

"And why not, pray ? Men are all bantam cocks, let them fight by all means. I say you are all muffs, all of you. You don't know how to stick up for the honour of your Fatherland. Now then, lift me up, Potápitch. Arrange to have a couple of porters always ready, hire them and see about wages and all. I don't want more than two. They need only carry the chair up stairs or up hills ; they can wheel it along on the level—tell them so. Pay them in advance, it looks better. Of course you must always be near, yourself ; and you, Alexey Ivanovitch, you must show me this baron when we are out. I must see this Von Baron of yours ! Now then, where are these roulette-tables ?"

I explained that the tables were in the Vauxhall, in the large salon. Then came question upon question :

"Are there many tables ? do many people play ? do they play all day ? what are the rules ?"

I explained that it was far the best way to go and see for oneself, because it was a very difficult thing to explain.

"Come along then, let's go straight there. You walk ahead and show the way, Alexey Ivanovitch."

"Surely you will rest first after your journey, aunt ?" asked the general, with solicitude. He was evidently a little pre-occupied ; in fact they all exchanged glances and looked significantly at one another at this point. Probably they did not quite like the risk of going straight off to the roulette tables with granny, for fear she might indulge in some of her eccentricities there in public, and meanwhile, they had committed themselves to escorting her out.

"Why should I rest ? I'm not tired. Why, I've been sitting still for five days. After that, we'll go and see the mineral waters and springs and things, and then that place—what did you call it, Paulina,—'Point' was it ?"

"Yes, granny."

"Well, Point, then ; what else is there to see ?"

"Oh, lots of other places, granny," said Paulina, who evidently didn't know much about it.

"Hem ! I see you don't know the place ; now then, Martha, you must come along with me," this was her maid.

"No, no, aunt, you can't take servants into the Vauxhall ; it's not the thing, they won't be allowed in," cried the general much agitated.

"Nonsense, am I to neglect them altogether because they are servants? Nonsense, why, we've been crawling along the railway for a week; surely they may be allowed to see a little life with me; they are living beings just as much as you are. Whom can they go with, if not with me? They wouldn't dare show their noses in the street alone in this foreign place."

"But, aunty—"

"Look here, sir; if you are ashamed of coming with me, you had better stay at home; nobody asked you to come. There's a haughty general for you! just as if I were not a general's widow too, and as good as himself. Besides I don't *want* all this collection of people wandering after my chair, like a tail; I shall do just as well alone with Alexey Ivanovitch."

But De Grier insisted that everybody should go with granny; and commenced a series of the most amiable phrases expressive of the joy he should experience in accompanying her.

So the procession was formed and moved on.

It was half a mile or so to the Vauxhall, and the way led through the chesnut avenue to the square, which was skirted, and thence straight along. The general seemed to be a little more easy in his mind now; for though our procession might appear eccentric, yet it was decidedly dignified; besides, he reflected, there was nothing strange in the fact of an invalid appearing at the waters in a condition of enfeeblement which necessitated her being carried about in a chair. He still, however, seemed to be a good deal anxious about the Vauxhall; why should an invalid, or especially an old woman, go to the roulette-tables at all? Paulina and Miss Blanche walked one on each side of the chair. Miss Blanche made herself very amiable, and laughed and chatted with granny; so that at last the latter seemed to have changed her first impression, and began to like her. Paulina, marching on the other side, was momentarily obliged to answer the innumerable questions put to her by the old woman, such as: "Who was that went by? Who was that girl, driving? Is the town a large one? Is the garden big? What sort of trees are these? What is the hill like? Are there any eagles here? What a funny roof!" and so on.

Mr. Astley walked alongside of me, and whispered that he expected to see great things this day.

Martha and Potápitch walked behind the chair; Potápitch wore his dress coat and white tie, and Martha, a grey-haired elderly woman, wore a print dress, and a pair of creaking new

shoes. Granny often turned and pointed out objects of interest to the servants, and chatted with them kindly. De Grier and the general walked together some way behind, talking about something or other with much warmth. The general appeared to be much dejected ; while De Grier was apparently laying down the law, with an air of great determination. Perhaps he was working the general up to something ; at all events he was evidently giving him advice of a pronounced character.

The old woman had said the fatal words, "I'm not going to give you any money," and I daresay De Grier was of opinion that the threat meant nothing ; but I fancy the general knew his aunt better, and was much dejected by her words.

I observed further, that De Grier and Blanche continued to exchange glances continually. As for the little prince and the German professor, they had left us in the avenue and gone off somewhere, together. We arrived at the Vauxhall in great triumph.

Among the servants and employés there was displayed the same alacrity and eagerness as had animated the servants of the hotel ; though much curiosity was displayed as well.

Granny first gave orders that her chair should be carried around all the rooms ; some of these pleased her, others did not ; but, about bad and good alike, her questions were endless. At last the procession arrived at the gambling salons.

The doorkeeper, standing on guard at the great doors, suddenly roused himself at the sight of our procession, and starting up flung both doors wide open.

The apparition of granny and her procession at the roulette-tables produced the profoundest impression upon the public. There were—counting both the roulette-tables, and the tables devoted to the game of *trente-et-quarante*—probably a hundred and fifty to two hundred persons present, standing in several rows.

Those who had managed to get hold of a good place close up to the table, stuck fast to their posts, and never budged an inch until they had lost all their money, only yielding place then because it is against the rules to occupy front places as mere spectators, without taking part in the play. Though there are chairs placed around the tables, very few players make use of them, especially when there are many present ; because one can crowd in much closer standing than sitting ; besides it is more convenient for staking. A second and third row of

people stood behind the lucky front rank, and watched the game, awaiting their turn with the best patience they could muster ; but occasionally some impatient hand would stretch out over the heads of those in front and stake a sum on a favourite figure or colour.

This happened occasionally even in the case of people standing in the *third* row ; so that there was rarely an interval of more than five or ten minutes without a quarrel being heard at one or the other end of the table as to disputed stakes. However, the police of the Vauxhall are pretty active.

This crowding round the tables cannot be avoided ; in fact I think the proprietors are pleased with it ; it is profitable enough for them. Eight croupiers sit round the tables carefully watching the stakes, calculating the gains and losses, and paying out or raking in the money. When quarrels arise these croupiers are the arbitrators.

In cases of extreme urgency, however, the assistance of the police is invoked, and the quarrel is then very soon at an end. The police authorities are always among the spectators, in plain clothes, so as not to be recognizable. They keep a special look-out over the petty thieves, and blacklegs, of which there are of course any number at the roulette-tables, owing to the ease with which thieving can be managed at such places. Generally robberies have to be effected by picking people's pockets, or by the smashing of locks, and so on ; these are very well in their way, but lead to unpleasant consequences, if not managed very adroitly ; whereas here, all you have to do is simply to approach the roulette-table, commence playing a modest game on your own account, and then suddenly, but openly, lay hold of somebody else's winnings and put them into your own pocket ; if any one objects, all that needs to be done is to stand up and loudly insist that the stake was your own. If the thing is neatly managed, and the witnesses are a little uncertain, it generally happens that the thief retains the money ; that is if the sum be not anything very important. It is not safe to claim the large stakes, because they are invariably remarked by the croupiers or the bystanders, before they are either won or lost. But the real proprietor of a small stake will often prefer to surrender his money to the blackleg rather than be party to a row. If a thief be convicted of course he is turned out at once.

Granny looked on at all this from some distance off, with the

greatest curiosity. She was especially delighted whenever a thief was caught and turned out.

Trente-et-quarante did not interest her a bit; but roulette, with its little jumping ball, filled her with excitement. At last she said she must have a nearer look at the game.

I don't know how it was managed, but the servants of the hotel, together with several officious Poles (of whom there are always a large number at the gaming-tables ready to offer their services to the wealthy or fortunate), cleared a way for granny's chair in no time, and found her a good place close to the table, and near the principal croupier, in spite of all the crowd and crush.

Many people who were present merely as spectators of the game, principally Englishmen with their families, instantly crowded up to the table, and transferred their attention from the game to granny. A host of eye-glasses were elevated in her direction. The croupiers were overjoyed—so eccentric-looking a player was sure to be a harbinger of good things to come. An old woman of seventy-five, and an invalid in a chair into the bargain, wanting to play at the roulette-board was indeed an unusual spectacle.

I elbowed my way up to the table, and took my stand next to granny. Potápitch and Martha had of course remained outside the magic circle, and were somewhere behind among the servants of the place. The general, Paulina, Miss Blanche, and De Grier all took up positions among the throng of spectators at the side.

Granny began by watching the game and the players. She kept asking me abrupt, short questions in a sort of half-whisper. "Who's that?" she would say; "who's that woman over there?" She was particularly pleased with a young fellow opposite who was playing a very high game, staking thousands and winning heavily. He had won already, as whispering tongues around informed us, at least forty thousand francs, all of which lay before him on the table in notes and gold. He was pale, and his eyes flashed, while his hands trembled with excitement. He staked, without counting the money, as much as his hand could grasp at a time; and yet he won and won, and was continually and perpetually raking and raking his new gains into the mass of money before him.

The servants buzzed officiously around him, cleared the places about his elbows, so that he might move the more freely,

letting no one crowd him, all in the hope of a rich harvest from the fortunate young gambler afterwards. Very often a lucky player, in the joy of his heart, will, after winning, tip these people with the wildest liberality, seizing as much money from his pocket as he can grasp, and giving it to one man, and then as much to another, and so on. Alongside of the young fellow in question stood one of the officious Poles referred to, as busy as possible, whispering and nudging, evidently giving the young gambler advice how and where to stake, and generally managing his game for him—of course, in the expectation of substantial rewards. But the youth evidently heard very little that was said to him ; he staked wildly and won everything. He was clearly losing his head.

Granny watched him for several minutes. "Tell him," she said to me suddenly, jogging my arm, "tell him to stop playing now ; tell him to take his money and go away. He'll lose it all directly ; he'll lose every bit of it," she burst out, almost panting with agitation. "Where's Potápitch? Send Potápitch to him. Oh, tell him ; do tell him, quick ! Where's that Potápitch ?"

"Sortez ! Sortez !" she began to shout to the young fellow at last.

I bent over her and whispered to her, with decision, that it was not allowed to shout like that here ; that it was not even permitted to talk out loud, because it disturbed the calculations ; and that if we disobeyed this rule, we should be turned out.

"Oh, the pity of it ! The young fellow will be ruined in a minute. Well, I suppose he *will* have it. I can't look at him any more ; I can't bear the sight !" and she hurriedly looked away.

Opposite us, a little to the left, I observed a young woman sitting next to a youth—some relation of hers, I think I had often remarked this lady before. She played every day at one o'clock, and left the table again precisely at two ; playing for exactly an hour each day. She was known, and at one o'clock every day her chair was ready for her. She used to take out her purse and stake a fixed sum, playing very carefully, and always calculating and noting each turn of the ball on a piece of paper at her side. This lady invariably used to win one or two thousand francs each day and then leave the tables.

Granny watched her for a long while. "There—she'll

never lose, *she'll* never lose. Look at that. Who is she, do you know?"

"French, I believe," I whispered; "she looks like it."

"Yes, she looks a regular bird of passage. Now then, you tell me what each turn of the ball means and how one stakes."

I did my best to explain to granny the meaning of all the combinations of numbers, and of "*rouge*" and "*noir*," and "*pair*" and "*impair*" and "*manque*" and "*passe*," and the variations of the numbers, and so on.

Granny listened very attentively, asked a few questions, and mastered the matter in a very short time. She could compare each explanation of mine with an example before her eyes, so that she had no difficulty in learning a great deal about the game in a very short space of time. Granny was greatly pleased.

"And what does zero mean?" she asked. "That croupier over there—the head one—called out 'zero' just now. And why did he grab all the money there was on the table? There was a tremendous heap of money staked, and he took it all."

"Zero, granny, is the bank's great gain. When the ball stops at zero, then everything on the board at the moment goes to the bank."

"No! and nobody can win then?"

"Well, if you had happened to stake *on* zero, then if zero turned up, you would be paid thirty-five times your stake."

"What? *thirty-five times* over? Does it come up often? Why don't these people stake *on* it?"

"Because there are thirty-six chances against it, granny."

"Nonsense. Here, Potápitch, Potápitch! I've got some money with me too; wait a bit. Here!" She lugged a large purse out of her pocket, well crammed with money, and took a friedrich d'or out.

"There; stake that on zero at once."

"Why, granny, zero has just been up," I said; "it won't come again now for a long time. You'll have to stake a long while on it before you can win. Wait a little and then try."

"Nonsense; stake."

"But look here, it may not turn up until the evening again. You may lose thousands that way; it has happened before."

"Nonsense! nonsense! if you're afraid of wolves don't walk in the wood.—Well, what? lost? Put another on."

The next was lost too. We staked a third. Granny could

hardly sit still for excitement. She glared with feverish eyes at the little ball dancing about in the roulette wheel; watching every jump it made.

We lost our third friedrich d'or. Granny was beside herself with irritation. She even banged the table with her fist when the croupier announced "thirty-six" instead of the desired zero.

"Look at that now," she cried. "When will that cursed little zero turn up? I shall stay here till it does, anyhow. It's that chief croupier's fault; he never will let it come up. Alexey Ivanovitch, stake ~~two~~ gold pieces at a time; at this rate, we sha'n't win anything on the whole transaction when the thing does come right."

"Granny, surely—"

"Stake it, I tell you; it's not your money."

I staked a couple of friedrichs d'or. The ball rolled in and out, and up and down, and all over the place, and at last, just as granny began to pinch my arm, in the extremity of her excitement, it stopped.

"Zero!" announced the croupier.

"There, you see," cried granny, turning sharp round to me, all beaming with delight. "I told you so. I believe Providence itself prompted me to stake two pieces that time. How much do I get now? Why don't they pay me? Potápitch! Martha! Where are those people? and where are all our folks gone to? Potápitch!"

"Afterwards, granny, we'll find him all right. He's over there by the door. They won't let him come here. Look—they are paying your money. Take it, granny."

The croupier handed over a heavy sealed packet containing fifty friedrichs d'or, and twenty more pieces of similar value, separate. I secured all this money and handed it to granny.

"*Faites le jeu, messieurs!* Stake up, ladies and gentlemen! *Rien ne va plus!* time's up!" cried the croupier, preparing to set the wheel going again.

"Good heavens, are ye too late? They'll set it spinning directly. Stake, stake, quick," cried granny excitedly. "Now then, don't bungle—look sharp," she added, giving me a tremendous dig in the ribs; she was quite beside herself with agitation.

"But what am I to stake on, granny?"

"On zero, on zero, on zero again! Stake as much as you

can ! How much have we ? Seventy friedrichs d'or ? Well, put on twenty at a time, go on, quick ! ”

“ But just consider, granny, sometimes it doesn't turn up for two hundred times. I assure you you'll stake all your money for nothing.”

“ Oh, nonsense, nonsense. Stake quick, and don't chatter so much. I know what I'm about,” and granny trembled all over with excitement.

“ We can't put more than twelve friedrichs d'or at a time on zero, granny,” I said ; “ more than that is not allowed ; but there, I've staked twelve ; look ! ”

“ Not allowed ? look here, I believe you're deceiving me. Hi, monsieur, monsieur,” she cried, addressing the croupier close to her side. “ Monsieur, *combien zero ? Douze ? douze ?* ” I interpreted her question into more intelligible French as quickly as I could.

“ *Oui, madame,* ” replied the croupier very politely ; “ just as each individual stake upon colours or numbers may not exceed four thousand florins,” he explained.

“ Very well, stake twelve if you can't stake more.”

“ *Le jeu est fait !* no more staking is allowed,” cried the croupier. The wheel turned, the ball hopped about and stopped at “thirteen.” We had lost our twelve friedrichs d'or.

“ More, more ! stake some more, quick ! ” cried granny. I did not think it any use to oppose her wishes any longer, and with a shrug of the shoulder sacrificed twelve more pieces of gold. Granny trembled as she watched the wheel go round ; it took a long spin round this time. “ Surely she does not expect to win with zero again,” I thought, as I watched her with astonishment. However, an expression of absolute confidence that she was going to win beamed in her face ; a certain hope that the croupier would call out “Zero” in another minute. Round went the ball with the wheel, and at last hopped off it into the board : “Zero ! ” cried the croupier.

“ What ! ” cried *grapfiy*, turning round to him with half incredulous triumph. I was a gambler myself. I felt it at this moment. My hands and feet trembled, my head buzzed. Of course this was a most unusual occurrence for zero to come up three times in some ten turns ; but it was by no means unprecedented. I was myself a witness the other day when zero came up *three times in succession*, and I remember an experienced player informed me at the time that he had marked

every fall of the ball during the whole of the day before, and that zero had only been called *once* during the entire period.

The croupier settled up with granny, as the largest winner, with great courtesy and marked attention. She had to receive exactly four hundred and twenty friedrichs d'or. Twenty of these were paid her in gold, and the four hundred in notes. This time granny did not call for Potápitch. She had other things to think about. She was not even trembling with excitement any longer, so far as one could see ; but she was, if I may make use of the expression, all of a tremble internally. She was evidently debating something in her mind, and forming some resolution. "Here, Alexey Ivanovitch, he says one may not stake more than four thousand gulden at a time ; take these four thousand here and stake them on red," she cried at last. It was too late to oppose her ; I hastened to stake the money, just in time before the wheel ceased turning.

"Red!" shouted the croupier.

Another win of four thousand gulden (four hundred friedrichs d'or)—that made eight thousand.

"Give me four thousand here, and stake four thousand more on the red," said granny.

I staked the four thousand again.

"Red!" cried the croupier once more.

"That's twelve thousand, give them all over here. Put the gold into the purse—so, and hide the paper money about you somewhere. So—now then—that's enough, let's go home."

CHAPTER XI.

GRANNY'S chair was wheeled over to the other end of the salon, towards the door. All our people now crowded around granny and congratulated her ; for, eccentric as the old lady was in her behaviour, her triumph covered a multitude of sins, and the general was no longer afraid of compromising himself by the confession of relationship with such a strange old person.

With great condescension, and with a sort of patronising smile, as though soothing some child, he congratulated granny

on her luck. He was evidently much impressed however, just as all the spectators had been. All the good people around were talking and pointing out granny to one another. Many of them passed and repassed us, so as to have a good look at her.

Mr. Astley was telling all he knew about the old lady to two English friends of his, at the other end of the hall; while several titled spectators, ladies, examined granny with true aristocratic curiosity. De Grier simply bubbled over with exuberant congratulations and amiable smiles.

"What a glorious victory!" he said.

"Why, madame, it was the fire of genius," added Miss Blanche with a winning smile.

"Yes, yes, you saw how I did it? I simply sat down, won twelve thousand odd guldens, and got up again—twelve thousand—it was much nearer thirteen thousand. What's that in Russian currency—six thousand roubles?"

I explained that it was over seven thousand, and at the existing rate of exchange very nearly eight thousand roubles.

"Think of that, eight thousand roubles! and all you muffs sit here and never make a farthing. Potápitch! Martha! did you see the fun?"

"Mistress, mother of us all, however did you manage it?—eight thousand roubles—gracious heavens!" exclaimed the amazed Martha.

"Here—here's five gold pieces each for you—there!" Potápitch and Martha rushed to kiss her hands.

"Give each of the bearers a gold piece!—give it them, you Alexey Ivanovitch! What's that flunkey bowing and dancing about on one leg for? and the other one too? Are they congratulating me? Give them each a friedrich d'or."

"Princess, I'm a poor exile, in perpetual misfortune. The Russian princes are so generous," whined one individual wearing an old tattered coat and parti-coloured waistcoat, and with a cap in his hand; "Russian princes are known to be so generous," he repeated with a servile smile.

"Give him a friedrich d'or too. No, give him two. Come now, that's enough; or we shall never have an end of these people. Lift me up, carry me away. Paulina, I'll buy you a dress to-morrow; and I'll buy one for her too—what's her name—Miss Blanche. I'll give her one too, tell her so, Paulina."

"Thank you, madame," said Blanche, amiably, but with an

ironical smile which she telegraphed to the general and De Grier. The general was a good deal ashamed of all this, and was very glad when we reached the avenue.

"Oh, won't the old nurse be surprised to hear all about this?" cried the radiant old lady. "I must buy her a dress too. Alexey Ivanovitch, give that beggar something. Give him a gulden."

I approached the man (who was not a beggar) and handed him the money. He smelt strongly of spirits, and took the gulden though he gave me a long stare of astonishment first.

"And you, Alexey Ivanovitch; have you tried your luck yet?" asked granny.

"No, not yet, granny."

"Ah, I saw your eyes flashing, though, at the table."

"Oh, I shall certainly try a turn or two some day."

"Well, you go and stake straight off on zero. You'll see what will happen. How much capital have you?"

"Twenty friedrichs d'or, all told, granny!" I said.

"Hum, that's not much! come, I'll lend you fifty more. Here, take this sealed packet. You needn't expect any, you know!" (She suddenly turned upon the general.) "I'm not going to give *you* any money!"

The general winced as if he had been shot. De Grier frowned.

"The devil! She's a terrible old woman that," he whispered through his teeth, to the general.

"Here's another beggar, another beggar! give him a gulden, Alexey Ivanovitch."

This time it was an old fellow with a wooden leg and a long great coat, and a stick in his hand. He looked like an old soldier. When I offered him the gulden he took a step back and looked savagely at me.

"*Was ist's, der Teufel!*" he shouted, following up the exclamation with a volley of oaths.

"Oh, he's a fool—come along," said granny; "I'm getting very hungry. Let's have some dinner now; then I shall lie down for a time, and after that I intend to go back to the roulette saloon."

"What are you going to play again, granny?" I asked.

"Why not? What else am I to do? Sit and watch you dull people doing nothing all day?"

"But, madame," said De Grier, "the chances change so quickly; one unlucky turn and you'll lose all you have—

especially with your system of playing ; it's terribly dangerous, madame."

" You are quite certain to lose," added Miss Blanche.

" And what business is it of all you good people ? it's not your money I lose, it's all my own ! Where's that Mr. Astley ?" she asked me.

" He remained in the Vauxhall, granny."

" I'm sorry for that, now, *he's* a good fellow—if you like !" said the radiant old woman, in high good humour with all the world.

On arriving at the hotel granny met the oberkellner on the stairs and could not resist calling him up and telling him of her good fortune. She next sent for Fedosia, the general's nurse, and boasted to her—presenting her with three friedrichs d'or. Then she ordered her dinner. Old Fedosia and Martha were chattering to each other and to granny the whole while.

" My goodness ! " Martha said. " I'm trembling all over with excitement to this very moment. Down there, in the hall, I said to Potápitch, says I, ' look at that, look at that,' says I, ' what's our mistress going to do now ? ' And the money about, the piles of money ! Holy saints ! I've never seen such a lot of money before in all my life ; and all around there were gentlemen and ladies sitting—*real* gentry, you know. ' And where on earth,' I says, ' did such a lot of smart gentlefolks come together from ? ' Then I began praying for luck for mistress, our little mother ; and I trembled and trembled all the time, all over ; and I thought I'd pray again, and I did, and Providence sent her all this money ; but I can't stop trembling yet, madame. I'm all of a tremble to this moment—"

" Alexey Ivanovitch ! " interrupted granny, " be ready to come for me at four o'clock, will you ? Good-bye now, for the present. Just send me up a doctor, will you ? any one will do. I must drink some of the waters as I am here ; if I don't have the doctor to keep me up to it I shall forget all about it."

I came out of granny's rooms with my head all awim with ideas and reflections. I tried to imagine what would happen to all our good people now, and what sort of a turn affairs would take. It was clear that they (especially the general) had not as yet come to themselves ; they had not even recovered the first shock of granny's arrival. " The fact of her very exist-

ence and of her sudden descent into their midst in place of the telegram—expected from hour to hour—announcing her death and their inheritance, had so overwhelmed them and so upset their calculations and arrangements, that they all seemed to have turned to stone, and looked upon granny's projected enterprises at the roulette-table with a sort of helpless wonder.

And yet this second fact was perhaps even more significant and important than the primary one of her appearance; because though granny had repeated twice over that she would not give the general any money, yet—who could tell what would happen? At all events, one could still hope.

De Grier certainly had not lost hope—De Grier, who was so intimately connected with all the general's affairs. Nor had Miss Blanche, who was also interested, and considerably too! in fact as far as the hope of being a general's lady and enjoying a huge inheritance could interest her. She had not lost hope at granny's words, because she relied on her power of coquetry to gain over the old lady, and felt that she could amuse her far better than the haughty, little, unbending Paulina ever could.

But now, now that granny had commenced playing at the roulette-table; now that the personality of the old woman—her obstinate and arbitrary individuality—was so conspicuously brought out before their eyes; now that they saw how granny had relapsed—as they expressed it—into second childhood, they felt the whole danger of the position. She gambled like a child and was quite certain to lose.

“My goodness!” I thought, and I hope I may be forgiven for feeling a malicious delight in the reflection. “My goodness, how every *friedrich d'or*, risked at the table by granny, had torn the heart of the general as he watched the game! How it had maddened De Grier; and how it had driven Blanche frantic with tantalization! She felt like a starving man, before whose mouth spoonfuls of delicious food are passed. And when—in the moment of her triumph, after winning so much money—when she distributed her *friedrichs d'or* broadcast to anyone who asked for them, and mistook every passer-by for a beggar, in her eagerness to give away money—when at this supreme moment of the joy of liberality, she had suddenly turned upon the general, and repeated again that *he* should not have a farthing—then at last it began to look serious—very serious. She had evidently fixed her mind obstinately upon this idea; and things were looking dangerous, decidedly dangerous.

These ideas flitted through my head as I went upstairs to my own room, which was at the very top of the house. All this exercised me wonderfully ; for though, of course, I had been cognizant of the principal features of the family secrets before, still I had not up till now been able to unravel all the little threads and knots of the puzzle.

Paulina had never treated me with entire confidence. For though she had occasionally appeared to me to open her whole heart for a little while, yet I remarked that nearly always, after such a moment of confidence, she would laugh and deny the truth of what she had been telling me, and try to confuse me into believing that she had been all along joking. At all events, I felt now that there must shortly be an end of all this secrecy and of the mysteries of the strained position in which the family had been for so long. One more blow and all would be over and the secret workings laid bare. As to my own share—as one interested in these matters to no mean extent—I did not bother myself at all. And yet my position was strange enough ; here was I, with but twenty friedrichs d'or in my pocket, a stranger in a foreign country, and far away from home ; with no employment and no means of existence ; with no hopes and no object in life ; and yet I didn't seem to care a scrap about it. Were it not for the thought of Paulina, I should simply have abandoned myself to the enjoyment of the comical side of the business, and laughed heartily at the idea of the inevitable smash up, shortly to be consummated. But the thought of Paulina troubled me a good deal. Her destiny was to be decided now, once and for all. I could see that, clearly ; but I must admit, it was not her destiny that troubled me.

What I wanted was to peer into her secret. I should like her to come to me and say, "Don't you see I love *you*?" and if not that—if that is too senseless and idiotic a hope—well then—I don't know *what* I want ; how am I to know?—perhaps I just want to be somewhere about her, in the glory of her presence—always—all my life. I don't know any more than this. At all events, I can't leave her.

On the third landing, in the passage, something seemed to give me an electric shock ; I turned, and there—twenty paces off, and just coming out of a door—was Paulina. It seemed as though she had been waiting and looking out for me ; and she beckoned me up at once.

"Paulina Alexandrovna!"

"Hush," she said.

"Fancy," I whispered, "just now I felt a sort of electric shock in the side, I looked round, and there *you* were! Do you keep a private current of electricity about you?"

"Take this letter," she began, in a preoccupied manner, and evidently not hearing a word of what I had been saying; "take this letter and give it to Mr. Astley—into his own hands, at once; be as quick as you can, please; there's no answer, for he himself—"

She did not finish her sentence.

"Mr. Astley!" I said, in astonishment.

But Paulina had gone in again, and the door was between her and me.

"Oho! so they correspond, do they?" I thought. However, of course I ran off as fast as I could to find Mr. Astley. I first looked for him in his hotel, but did not find him; then I made off to the Vauxhall, and hunted up and down, and round about every room and corner; and at last, in despair, I turned home-wards once more without success; but to my joy I accidentally met him outside: he was riding—one of a party—with a number of other English ladies and men. I beckoned him up to me and gave him the letter. We hadn't even time to look at one another; but I have a shrewd suspicion that Mr. Astley let his horse gallop off as quickly as possible for reasons of his own.

Was I jealous? I was in a state of confusion of mind. I felt as though I did not care to find out what they were corresponding about. "At all events he is her trusted friend," I thought, "a friend is a friend—that's nothing; but when did they make friends, and is there *love* in the question?"

"Of course not," whispered my common sense.

But common sense in these cases is not enough. At all events, it must be cleared up before long. Matters were not arranging themselves pleasantly, altogether.

I had hardly reached the hotel when the porter and the ober-kellner, who rushed out of his sanctum to impart the news, hastened to inform me that I had been sent for three times to go at once to the general's study. I was in a very bad humour. When I reached the general's room, I found there besides the general, De Grier and Miss Blanche—the latter alone, without her mother.

This mother of hers was a most artificial arrangement; she

was only paraded in public; and when there was real business to be done, Miss Blanche managed her own affairs without the "maternal" assistance, reserving that relative for purely state use. Probably Madame Veuve de Cominges knew nothing whatever about Blanche's private affairs.

The three assembled friends had evidently been discussing something with considerable warmth; and with secrecy, also, for the inner door of the study was shut, which was a very unusual thing. As I approached the door, I plainly distinguished the insolent and sarcastic tones of De Grier's voice, the scolding, angry accents of Blanche, and the poor old general's piteous whine, evidently justifying something he had done or said. At my appearance all three of them stopped talking at once and plumed their feathers, as it were.

De Grier smoothed his hair, and out of his—a moment since—angry scowling face, manufactured in an instant that detestable, smiling, officially polite French leer which I so cordially hate. The poor stricken old general assumed an air of dignity on the spot; but it was clear that the change was one of habit, and that he was far from feeling the dignity he assumed.

Miss Blanche alone made very little effort to change her angry expression; she stopped talking however, and stared at me with a look of impatient expectation. I may remark that hitherto she had treated me with almost incredible indifference; she used not even to return my bows; in fact, she took no notice of me whatever.

"Alexey Ivanovitch," began the general, in suavely polite tones, but with a suspicion of remonstrance in their accents: "Alexey Ivanovitch, may I point out to you that it is very strange, in the very highest degree strange—in a word, your conduct towards my family—is—in a word—in the highest degree strange—"

"*Eh ! ce n'est pas ça !* it's not that at all," interrupted De Grier, with a show of annoyance and contempt for the last speaker; it was clear he was the guiding spirit, here. "*Mon cher monsieur, notre cher general se trompe.* The general is making a little mistake, my dear sir. What he wished to say to you was, to *warn* you—or, in other words, to tell you—to persuade you, rather, not to ruin him. Yes, yes, *ruin* him, I use the expression purposely."

"But how, *how*?" I interrupted.

"Why, my dear sir, by undertaking to be the guide, so to

speak, of this old woman, this terrible old woman. She'll lose every farthing she has, she will indeed. You saw yourself, you were an eye-witness of her style of play. If she begins to lose she won't leave the table ; she'll stick to it out of pure obstinacy and devilry, and go on playing and playing—and you know in such cases one never wins back what one has lost—and then—”

“ And then,” the general put in, “ then you'll ruin our whole family ; I and my family are her heirs, she has no other near relations. I don't mind telling you candidly that my affairs are involved, badly involved ; I daresay you know something about it already. Well, if she were to lose any very large sum, or, perhaps (gracious heaven !) her whole property, what would then become of them—of my children ? ” (the general glanced at De Grier) “ of me ? ” (he glanced at Blanche, who turned away from him in disdain). “ Alexey Ivanovitch ! Alexey Ivanovitch, save us ! ”

“ But tell me, general—for goodness' sake—what can I do in the matter ? ”

“ Refuse to have anything to do with her, drop her.”

“ Why she would find someone else ! ” I cried.

“ *Non non ce n'est pas ça, que diable !* ” cried De Grier again : “ it's not that, you can't do that ; but at all events you can talk to her ; make her ashamed of herself ; persuade her to leave the tables. Well, at least don't let her lose too much ; drag her away.”

“ But how am I to do all this ? Hadn't you better undertake it yourself, Monsieur de Grier ? ” I said, as naïvely as I could.

I observed an instantaneous effect of my speech, in a flash of intelligence between De Grier and Blanche. She glanced inquiringly at him.

“ The thing is, she would not accept my services, not now,” said De Grier. “ If only she would—afterwards—perhaps—”

De Grier glanced swiftly and significantly at Miss Blanche.

“ Oh, my dear Mr. Alexey, *do* be so good—” said Miss Blanche herself to me, with a bewitching smile, and seizing both my hands tight in her own. Deuce take it ! that demon's face of hers changes in an instant.

In a moment her expression had become so sweet and entreatying, and she looked at me with so childish and playful a smile—she even gave me a sly wink when the others weren't watching her face—that I didn't know what to do with myself.

Was she going to vanquish me at one blow? It wasn't a bad attempt anyhow—but sudden, and abrupt—dreadfully abrupt. The general jumped up off his chair too, and skipped towards me, he literally *skipped*.

"Alexey Ivanovitch, you must forgive me for beginning to speak to you as I did when you came in, you must indeed; I didn't mean to say that—I beg you, I implore and entreat you, and I swear to you as Russian to Russian, that you—you alone can save us. Miss de Cominges and I both entreat you—you must understand the state of things, you *must* understand my position!" he cried in the most piteous way, directing his eyes to Miss Blanche.

At this moment there came three politely soft knocks at the door; it opened, and a waiter appeared conducting Potápitch. They had come as messengers from granny; their orders being to find me at once, and convey me to their mistress. "She's very angry with you, sir," Potápitch added.

"Why, it's only half-past three."

"Yes, sir; but she could not get her nap. She ~~tossed~~ about, at last sat up, and called for her chair, and sent us for you; she is now waiting on the outside steps, sir."

"What an infatuated old fool!" growled De Grier.

Sure enough, I found granny outside, on the steps; beside herself with rage and impatience because I had not turned up. She had not been able to hold ~~out~~ till four o'clock!

"Come on, come on," she said, "lift me up—off we go, quick!"

And away we went to the roulette-tables again.

CHAPTER XII.

GRANNY was in a dreadfully impatient, and excited condition; it was clear that roulette had taken complete possession of her. She took no notice of anything; nothing else seemed to be of any interest to her. She asked none of those questions of which she had been so lavish on our last progress along this same road. Only once she raised her hand and pointed to a particularly smart carriage which passed us

at the moment, asking whose it was? But I am sure she did not listen to my reply. Her reflections were continually broken in upon by excited movements of the body. When I pointed out Baron and Baroness Warmerholm, as we neared the Vauxhall, she merely looked up calmly, and with unruffled composure said, "ah," turning round immediately to Potápitch and Martha, who walked behind, and saying to them :

"What have you come for? I'm not going to take you every time, you know; you must be off home. You are all I require with me," she added to me, when the servants bowed hastily, and retired homewards.

Granny was evidently expected at the saloon. Official hands soon cleared her old place for her, next to the croupier.

I don't believe these croupiers are, as some pretend, absolutely indifferent to the losses or gains of the bank, like ordinary clerks of banks. On the contrary, I believe they take the greatest interest in the business done and its results, and that they hold their own instructions as to the attracting of good players to the board, and as to carefully watching and working for the interest of the bank. I believe they get prizes and premiums for their successes in these respects. At all events, they clearly looked upon granny as a victim— It all turned out as they expected on this occasion, as it happened, and I will now describe the march of events.

Granny made straight for zero, and insisted on staking twelve friedrichs d'or, the maximum each time.

I staked for her—once—again—a third time—and zero did not turn up.

"Go on, stake again," said granny, poking me in the ribs impatiently. I obeyed her, and continued.

"How many times have we staked on zero now?" she asked at length, gnashing her teeth with impatience.

"This is the twelfth time," I said. "One hundred and forty-four friedrichs d'or gone. I tell you, granny, we may go on like this till the evening."

"Be quiet!" granny interrupted me. "Stake on zero again, and put a thousand gulden on red besides. Here, put the note on."

Red won, but zero lost again. The croupier handed over a thousand gulden.

"There, you see," said the old ady, "nearly all that we

lost by staking on zero. Go on zero again ; we'll try it ten times more, and then drop it."

But granny got sick of it at the fifth trial after this.

"Let the wretched little thing go to the deuce," she said : "now then, stake the whole four thousand guldens on red."

"Oh, granny, why so much at a time ?" I protested ; "supposing red does not turn up ?" But granny very nearly struck me in her rage and impatience ; in fact, she *did* jog me so violently with her elbow, that one might almost call it striking.

Well, there was nothing to be done ; I had to stake the four thousand guldens, the best part of our morning's winnings.

The wheel turned. Granny sat erect and still, she had no doubt whatever but that she was about to win this time.

"Zero !" cried the croupier.

At first granny did not realise what had happened ; but, when she saw the croupier raking up her four thousand guldens, together with everything else there was on the table, and understood that zero—which had not been called for so long, and upon which we had staked nearly two thousand guldens for nothing—had turned up exactly when she had cursed it, and given it up as a bad job,—she clapped her hands with wrath and woe, and gave vent to an exclamation of bitter disappointment, which made every one at the table laugh.

"My goodness !" she cried, "there's the ill-omened little beast turned up, curse him ! that's you," she added, turning savagely to me, and jogging me hard with her elbow, "that's *your* fault, sir ; it was *you* who advised me wrong."

"My dear granny," I protested, "I only told you what was the right game. I can't possibly guarantee all the chances of roulette."

"Chances ! I'll *chance* you ! Get away from me."

"Good-bye, granny," I said, getting up to go away.

"Alexey Ivanovitch ! Alexey Ivanovitch ! Where are you off to ? Stay here. What a man you are ! What a temper—fancy getting angry like that. What a fool you must be. Come, come ; stay a ~~bit~~ longer, I'm an old fool myself. Now then, tell me, what shall I do next ?"

"No, no, granny ; I'm not going to advise you, because you'll be blaming me if it turns out wrong ; play your own game ; you give me your orders and I'll stake the money."

"Very well. Now then, stake four thousand more on red ;

there's the purse, take it." She pulled her purse out of her pocket and gave it to me. "There, take it quick, there's twenty thousand roubles there."

"Good heavens, granny!" I exclaimed, "fancy carrying about so much money."

"I don't care—never mind, go on—I don't mind if I lose every farthing, I'm going on. Stake." I staked on red, and we lost.

"Stake again, quick! Stake eight thousand gulden now!"

"We can't, granny;—four thousand is the highest stake permissible."

"Well, stake four thousand, then; but be quick."

This time we won.

Granny was delighted.

"There, there; she whispered, nudging me hard. "You see. Stake four thousand more, quick."

I put the money on—and lost it.

Next time we lost again, and then again.

"Granny," I told her, "we've lost the whole twelve thousand."

"Yes, I see we have," she replied, with a sort of composed rage, if one may so call it; "I see it, my dear sir, I see it," she muttered again, staring straight before her without moving a muscle, and apparently reflecting.

"Oh—go on, put another four thousand on," she said, "who cares?"

"But there's no money, granny, there are a lot of Russian securities and some circular notes, or something, in here; but no money."

"Isn't there anything in the small purse?"

"Nothing but small change."

"Are there no money-changing offices about? I was told one could change any Russian securities here quite easily," said granny, quickly and decidedly.

"Oh, of course—as many as you like," I said; "but you'll lose so much in the exchange, granny."

"Nonsense, I shall win it all back. Bosh, call up those villains,—here, lift my chair up and carry me off, quick."

I wheeled her out of the crowd, and the porters turned up at once.

We started away as fast as we could; but not fast enough to please granny.

"Quicker, quicker, go on!" she urged. "You show us the road—Alexey Ivanovitch—and mind you take the shortest; is it far?"

"A couple of steps, granny, that's all."

But at the turn out of the square into the avenue we came across the whole of our family party; De Grier, the general, Miss Blanche, and her mother; Paulina was not with them, nor was Mr. Astley.

"Now then, now then—don't stop us!" shouted granny, "what do you want? We can't waste our time with you here!"

I was walking behind the chair; De Grier came up to me quickly:

"We've lost all the morning's gains and twelve thousand guldens of her own money besides; and now we are on our way to change some of her Russian securities," I whispered, hastily.

De Grier stamped his foot, and ran to tell the general the news. We continued to wheel granny along as fast as we could. "Stop her, stop her," whispered the general to me in a frantic state of mind.

"Just you try and stop her yourself," I replied to him.

"Auntie," he began, coming close to her side. "Auntie, we are just—we are just—" his voice shook and trembled, "we are going to engage horses and drive out of town—there's such a magnificent view from a place near here—the Point—we were just coming to ask you to join us."

"Oh, bother you and the Point," cried the old woman, turning her back on him angrily.

"There's a village there, and we—were going to have some—" continued the poor general, in a condition of piteous despair.

"*Nous boirons du lait sur l'herbe fraîche*," added De Grier with ferocious malice in his eyes; "We'll have some milk and sit on the nice fresh turf." This "*du lait sur l'herbe fraîche*," is the beau ideal of the middle-class Parisian's idyllic happiness, it is well known to be his whole idea of nature and truth.

"Oh, bother you and your milk, go and drink the nasty stuff yourself; I'm not going to spoil my digestion for you. And what have you all come buzzing about here for? I tell you I have no time to waste jabbering with you."

"Here we are, granny," I said; "there is the place." We

wheeled the chair up to the banker's office. I went in to change the money, while the old lady stayed and waited at the door. De Grier and the general and Miss Blanche stood aside and waited too, they evidently did not know what to do. Granny glared angrily at them until they all strolled off along the road to the Vauxhall.

'The banker offered me such a villainous rate of exchange that I could not make up my mind to accept it, and came out again to ask for granny's instructions.

"Oh, the thieves!" she cried, clapping her hands together. "Oh! the scoundrels!—never mind, there's nothing to be done, change the money," she added with decision; "but wait a bit, tell the banker to come out here to me."

"Shall I ask one of the clerks, granny?"

"Very well, a clerk then. Oh, the thieves!"

One of the clerks condescended to come out when he learned that it was a feeble and lame old countess who could not possibly come in herself. Granny lectured him long and angrily for his "scoundrelly behaviour," and bargained with him in a mixture of Russian, French, and German. I acted as interpreter. The serious looking clerk stared a good deal at both of us and silently shook his head. He examined granny rather too curiously for politeness, and at last he smiled outright.

"Well, go away," cried the old lady, "and may you choke with my money. Give it him, Alexey Ivanovitch—we've no time for this sort of nonsense, or I'd go to another banker. Let him change it, quick!"

"The clerk says that the others would give you still less."

I don't remember exactly how the calculation came out, but I know the loss was fearful. I changed the value of twelve thousand florins, which I received in notes and gold, snatched up the account, and took it all out to granny.

"Come, come, come, no counting it, there's no time for that nonsense. Away we go, quick, quick, quick," cried granny, frantic with impatience.

"I shall never stake on that cursed zero again--nor on red either," she said, as we came near the Vauxhall.

This time I did all I could to persuade her to stake as little as possible at a time, assuring her that when the luck changed there would be time enough to stake large sums. But she was so impatient that though at first she consented to follow my advice, yet as the game proceeded there was no possibility of re-

straining her ardour. No sooner did she win stakes of ten or twenty *friedrichs d'or*, than she would jog me violently and say:

"There, there, now we are winning. If only we had had four thousand on, instead of that wretched hundred, we should have *won* four thousand. What's the use of that humbugging hundred *gulden*, it's all your fault—it's all your fault."

And annoyed as I was to witness her suicidal game, I resolved that I would shut my mouth and give her no more advice whatever. Suddenly De Grier came up. They had all three been watching from the side the whole time. I noticed that Miss Blanche was flirting terribly with the little prince. The general was evidently out of favour, if not actually suffering ~~persecution~~. Blanche would not even look at him, though he was doing his very utmost to be agreeable to her. Poor general! he paled and blushed and paled again, and trembled all over. He was so agitated that he did not even watch granny's game. Blanche and the prince left the saloon at last, and the general hastened after them.

"Madame, madame, that will never do," interposed De Grier, elbowing himself in until he could whisper into granny's ear; "you must not stake like that, it's most fatal. No, no, I assure you!"

"How then? Come, you shall show me," said granny.

De Grier immediately began a long history in French, of how one must wait for one's luck, and all the rest of it; and began reckoning up figures on a bit of paper and making all sorts of calculations—not one iota of which did granny understand. He continually referred to me to translate what he was saying into Russian; he drummed on the table and talked and calculated, and calculated and talked and drummed, till at last granny entirely lost her patience.

"Oh, get away, get away, do, it's all a lot of humbug! you and your 'Madame, madame.' You don't understand anything whatever about the matter—get away."

"But, my dear *Madame*," began De Grier again, and once more he recommenced his calculations and explanations; he was evidently very much in earnest.

"Well, stake just once as he tells you," said granny to me; "we shall see; perhaps it may turn out as he says, who knows?"

All De Grier really wanted was to prevent the old woman from staking too high. He asked her to put her money on

certain numbers, individually and collectively ; at his direction I staked one friedrich d'or each on all the uneven numbers from one to twelve, and five each on the group twelve to eighteen, and the group eighteen to twenty-four : the whole stake amounting to sixteen friedrichs d'or.

The wheel turned.

"Zero!" cried the croupier. And all our money went by the board.

"What a *fool* you are," said granny, turning to De Grier, "you wretched, abominable Frenchman—get out, will you ; a humbug like you setting up to give advice, get away—you know nothing about it—get out."

The mightily offended De Grier shrugged his shoulders and, glaring contemptuously at granny, left the table. He heartily wished he had not interfered, and was evidently ashamed of having acknowledged to any connection with the eccentric old woman.

Well, in an hour, do what we could, we had lost every farthing granny had.

"Home!" cried granny. She never said a word until we came to the avenue ; when we reached the end of it, near the hotel, she began to give vent to exclamations.

"Old fool, what an old fool you are, what a born old idiot."

Hardly had we reached her room, than she shouted :

"Tea, quick, and then pack up the things ; we are off at once."

"Where do you think of going to, little mother?" asked Martha ?

"What's that to you ? you can speak when you're spoken to, otherwise, you may keep your tongue within your teeth ; here, Potápitch, pack up everything—quick, we are going off to-night, I've frittered fifteen thousand roubles away."

"Fifteen, thousand roubles ! my goodness me !" exclaimed Potápitch, clasping his hands to express both his sorrow and his horrified sympathy.

"Now then, you fool, don't begin to whine here, be quiet and go and pack the things. Bring me the bill, 'quick.'

"The next train doesn't start until half-past eight, granny," I said, wishing to calm her excitement a little.

"What time is it now ?"

"Half-past six."

"What a nuisance—well, it can't be helped. Alexey Ivano vitch, I haven't got a farthing of money ; here, take these two

securities and just go over there again, will you, and change them for me? Otherwise, I can't even pay for my railway ticket."

I started off at once, and when I returned to the hotel, half an hour later, I found all the family assembled in granny's apartments. On hearing of granny's projected departure for Moscow they had been even more unpleasantly impressed than they were by her losses. Of course her departure would save the rest of her fortune; but what on earth would the general do now? Who would pay De Grier? Miss Blanche, naturally, would never wait until granny died; she would most assuredly make off with the little prince, or with some one else more profitable than the old general.

They were all standing around granny, soothing her and trying to talk her over. Paulina was absent again. Granny was shouting furiously at them:

"Get away from me, all of you. What business is it of yours? What does this stupid goat-bearded fellow want with me?" (this was an allusion to De Grier,) "and you, you fawning love-bird, you, what are you coming wheedling here for?" This last remark was addressed to Blanche.

"Oh, come," muttered Miss Blanche, with her eyes flashing and a flush of anger all over her face. But suddenly she burst out laughing, and left the room. "Why, she'll live a hundred years," she said aloud to the general, as she passed out of the door.

"Oho! then you are reckoning on my death, are you?" cried granny to the wretched general; "get out of this—be off; drive them all out of here, Alexey Ivanovitch; what have you all got to do with *me*, I should like to know? I've not lost any of *your* money, it's all my own."

The general shrugged his shoulders, bent his head, and went out. De Grier followed him.

"Call Paulina," said granny to Martha.

After five minutes Mrs Martha returned conducting Paulina. All this time Paulina had been closeted in her own room with the children; I believe she had made up her mind not to go out all day. Her face looked sad and serious, and very pre-occupied.

"Paulina," began granny, "is it true, what I heard accidentally a little while ago, that that fool of a fellow, your step-father, wants to marry this twirligig of a Frenchwoman? What

is she? an actress, or something worse still? Tell me now, is it true or not?

"I can't tell you for certain, granny," said Paulina; "but I infer from Miss Blanche's own words—and I don't know why she should conceal the truth—that—"

"Enough, enough," cried the angry old woman, with energy, "I understand it all. I always knew him to be capable of this sort of thing, and to be a silly weak-minded nincompoop of a fellow altogether. He thinks himself a very great man, because he is a general (only a retired colonel, by the way). I know, my lass, very well indeed, how you all sent telegram after telegram to Moscow, all to the same tune, 'will the old woman turn up her toes soon?' I quite understand, it was the money that was wanted; this wretched woman, what's her name—Cominges? wouldn't accept him as her flunkey unless he brought her plenty of money—him and his false teeth. They say she has a lot of money of her own, and let's it out on usury, a nice sort of way to enrich oneself! I don't blame you, Paulina, it was not you who sent the telegrams and I don't wish to recall the past; I know you have a vile temper, if you bit one the wound would swell up I should think; but I'm sorry for you, because I loved your dead mother. Now, look here, if you like you shall throw up all this set and come away with me, there's no room for you among them; it is not even proper for you to be with them. Wait a minute," added granny, as Paulina was about to speak, "I've not quite done yet. I shall not claim anything from you, I am not exacting; my house in Moscow is, as you are aware, a palace; you shall have a whole flat in it to yourself, if you like, and need not come down to see me more than once a week, if it so pleases you, and you don't like my personal character and ways—so, is it a bargain or not?"

"Allow me just to ask you first—surely you are not going at once, are you?"

"I am not a joker, young lady; I have said that I am going, and I shall go. I have jest fifteen thousand good roubles this day on that thrice accursed roulette-board of yours. Five years ago I promised to rebuild a little church, out of town; and now here am I spending the money over this abominable roulette instead. However, I'm off home to-night, to build the church."

"And what about the waters, granny? didn't you come to drink the mineral waters?"

"Oh, bother you and your waters, Paulina ! Are you trying to annoy me on purpose, or what ? tell me at once, will you come, yes or no ?"

"I am very, very grateful to you, granny," began Paulina with great feeling, "for the refuge which you offer me so kindly. You have partly guessed my present position. I so fully appreciate your kindness that I will come some day, I assure you I will ! perhaps very soon ; but just now there are reasons—very important ones—which prevent my deciding at once to go. If you could only wait a fortnight or so—"

"That means you do not wish to come !"

"No, it means I *can't*. Besides, I cannot leave my little brother and sister, at all events, because—because—because, undoubtedly, things may happen here which will leave them, as it were, cast aside and deserted ! so that you see, granny, if you could take the little ones in also, of course I would come, and I do assure you, solemnly, I should earn your love, granny," she added with great warmth and feeling, "but I can't possibly leave the children here."

"Well, well, all right, don't snivel here !" (Paulina wasn't thinking of snivelling or crying, which was an amusement she never did indulge in !) "all right, there's plenty of room for the chicks too ! the poultry house is big enough in all conscience ; and besides, the brats ought to be going to school. So you won't come at once ! Well, Paulina, look out ! that's all I can say ; I wish you well, you know, and I know very well why you don't wish to come now, I know all about it, I assure you. This Frenchman will lead you to no good, Paulina."

Paulina blushed up. I trembled all over. Everybody apparently knew all about this mystery excepting myself.

"Well, well, don't frown ! I'm not going to subject you to an examination ; but do take care that evil doesn't come of this business, Paulina. You are an intelligent girl, I should not like to see you come to any harm. Well, that's enough ! I wish I had never come and seen you all. Go away now, good-bye."

"I shall see you off, granny," said Paulina.

"No, no, I don't want you, you'll only be in the way ; and besides, I'm tired of you all."

Paulina kissed granny's hand, but granny drew it away, and kissed Paulina's cheek.

As she passed me, Paulina glanced quickly at me, and then as quickly away again.

"Well, good-bye, you too, Alexey Ivanovitch. There's only an hour till the train goes ; and I should think you must be as tired as I am. Here, take this packet of gold pieces, there are fifty of them in it."

"Thank you very much, granny ; but I am ashamed of accepting it—"

"Oh, nonsense, nonsense !" cried the old woman so angrily and energetically that I had no course open to me but to accept the packet.

"At Moscow, if you happen to be knocking about without a place, just come to me, and I'll soon introduce you somewhere. Now then, off you go."

I went up to my own room and lay down. I think I must have lain so about half an hour, on my back, with my arms stretched out behind my head. The catastrophe had begun —there was enough to think about. I decided that to-morrow I would have a decisive talk with Paulina.

The Frenchman—granny had referred to him, and coupled Paulina's name with his, so there was some truth in the idea after all ! Paulina and De Grier, good heavens, what a union ! Oh, it was impossible. I was nearly beside myself with the very idea of such a thing. I jumped up, and was about to rush off to Astley's, in order to make him speak out at all costs. Of course, he knew all about it, much better than I did. Mr. Astley, ha ! and there's fruit for more guesswork for me too !

But just at this moment there was a knock at the door ; I opened it—there stood Potápitch.

"Oh, sir, Alexey Ivanovitch !" he said, excitedly. "Would you come to the-mistress, she's asking for you."

"What is it ? is she just off ? there's twenty minutes before the train starts."

"Oh, she's dreadfully agitated, sir ; she can hardly sit still. 'Quick, quick, bring him here !' she keeps calling out, meaning you, sir. Do come as quick as you can, for goodness' sake."

I ran off downstairs at once.

Granny had been wheeled into the corridor already, she was waiting for me with her purse in her hand.

"Alexey Ivanovitch, come along, you go on in front, let's be off, quick,"

"Where to, granny?"

"I'm going to win my money back, I don't care for anybody. Come now, off we go—no questions! one can play till midnight, can't one?"

I was stupefied. But I thought for a moment, and then came to a decision.

"Say what you like, Antonida Vassilievna, but I will *not* come."

"What! why 'not?' what's the meaning of this? are you funkling out of it? You're all a set of cowards."

"Say what you like—I should reproach myself for it afterwards if I were to go with you now—no, I won't go. I don't wish to be either a witness or a participator. Excuse me, Antonida Vassilievna, here are your fifty friedrichs d'or back, good-bye."

I placed the packet of money on a little table by the side of her arm-chair, made my bow, and went away.

"What a pack of nonsense," cried granny after me. "Stay by all means if you prefer it; I shall easily find my way alone. Potápitch, you shall go with me; now then, lift me up, off we go."

I did not find Mr. Astley at home, and came back again to the hotel. It was late at night—nearly one o'clock—when I learned from Potápitch how the old lady had finished the day. She had lost all I had changed for her before, that is the value of ten thousand roubles more.

That same Pole to whom she had given two friedrichs d'or had met her there, and taken command of her interests; he had played her game for her the whole time. At first, she employed Potápitch to do her staking for her, but she had very soon driven him away, and then the Pole turned up. It so happened that this man understood Russian, and by dint of a mixture of that language with French and German, they were enabled to understand each other, more or less.

Granny had abused him furiously the whole while, and though he had put on aristocratic Polish airs, yet, as Potápitch observed, "he couldn't be compared with *you*, Alexey Ivanovitch! Why, my mistress always treats *you* quite like a gentleman; and as for the Pole—why, I saw him with my own eyes, simply steal some of her money off the table and pocket it. She caught him thieving twice, Alexey Iyapovitch, and didn't she just give it him; she called him every kind of name, and she

actually pulled his hair for him twice, sir, I solemnly assure you she did, I'm not lying, sir—and everybody laughed—all round the table."

"She lost everything, *everything*," he continued, "all the money you changed for her. We brought her down here, and she just asked for a little water, crossed herself, and lay down on her bed. She must have been dreadfully tired, for she fell asleep instantly. God send her sweet angels' dreams! Oh, this foreign travelling," continued Potápitch, "I always said it would lead to no good. The sooner we get home to Moscow the better. What is there that we haven't got at home? Gardens, flowers—and flowers that you might look for here in vain, apples dropping off the trees, delicious scents, lots of room—*everything* that the soul can desire. But no, we must needs come abroad. Oh, dear! oh, dear!"

CHAPTER XIII.

HERE'S a whole month gone by since I last touched my memoirs—memoirs begun under the influence of impressions strong enough in themselves, if disconnected and without much sequence.

The catastrophe which I foresaw came, sure enough; but far more unexpectedly and suddenly than I thought it would. The whole affair was most strange and wonderful, and even tragic, so far as I myself was concerned. Certain things happened to me which really have appeared to me since to be little less than miraculous; and yet, if one looks at them from another point of view, and judges them merely as consistent results of the whirlpool of fate, in the vortex of which I was borne round and round at the time, these phenomena seem to be very little out of the ordinary way of the world.

But the most miraculous thing of all is the manner in which I lose myself in connection with all these events. To this moment, I cannot understand myself. And yet, it has all passed away like a dream—even my passion, which was both real and strong, what has become of it now? I assure you, people may say what they like, but it very often strikes me to ask myself:

"Wasn't I mad at the time, perhaps? wasn't I an inmate of some lunatic asylum—perhaps, I *still* am—and only *seemed* to be an actor in all these events, and still imagine that I was?"

I collected and read over my notes. Perhaps, I did this simply to try and find out whether I really was in a mad house when I wrote them. . . . Now, I am all alone. Autumn is upon me, and the yellow leaf. I sit in this melancholy little town (oh, how miserably lonely and depressing these German towns are!) here, I sit, and instead of thinking what I am to do next, I live under the shadow of the immediate past, I breathe but the recollections—the fresh memories of what has just gone by, under the influence of the late terrible storm, which caught me up into the whirlwind of exciting events, and threw me down again anyhow, anywhere. I still seem, at times, to be carried madly round in the same whirlwind, and feel that at any moment the dread storm blast may arise again and catch me up as it passes, on its wing; and once more I shall ascend into the atmosphere of lawlessness and disproportion, and fly around and around and around.

However, I may cease to whirl round some time or other, if only I can grapple with my own understanding and give myself a clear account of all that has happened during the last month. I feel drawn to take up my pen again, especially as there is nothing whatever to do of an evenng here. Just fancy my being driven to read a German translation of Paul de Kock's novels (out of the abominable library here) for the sake of something to do. I hate the books, and yet I go on reading them, and wondering at myself for doing it, just as though I were afraid of reading any more serious work, or, in fact, of undertaking any kind of serious employment, for fear of breaking the spell of the immediate past. As if, too, this confounded dream, and all the impressions it left upon my mind, were so very dear to me that I was afraid of doing anything to disturb it, lest it should vanish into thin air.

Is all this dear to me, then, or not? Yes, of course, it is dear. I shall probably remember it all forty years hence as vividly as now.

Well, I shall take up my pen and jot it all down. I shall tell myself the story shortly, and in a condensed form; the impressions left on my mind are—but, come, let me begin where I left off.

First, let me finish with granny. The next day after the one

described, she was quite cleared out. Of course, she was bound to be. As soon as people of her stamp once get upon that path, just as a sledge placed upon the top of a snow hill, and pushed off thence--away they go, quicker and quicker down hill.

She played all day until eight o'clock in the evening. I was not present during her final play. All that I know, I have heard from others. Potápitch was guard to her at the Vauxhall ; and the Poles, who managed the game for her, changed places seyeral times. She began by kicking out her Polish manager of the day before--the one whose hair she had pulled ; but the new one turned out, if possible, worse than the first. Having driven away the second, and taken back the first, who had never really left her but had continually pushed his head across to offer advice and so on, the poor old woman at length gave way to absolute despair. The second Pole would not go away any more than the first ; so that one stood at her left hand and the other at her right.

These two worthies swore at one another the whole while, criticising each other's stakes and system of play generally, and calling each other all sorts of Polish names of scant courtesy ; then they would make friends again, and pitch granny's money about without the slightest order, or system, or common sense. While quarrelling, they very often staked on both sides of the table ; for instance, one staked on black and the other on red.

At last things arrived at such a pitch, that poor granny, bewildered and lost and almost in tears with despair, was obliged to appeal to the chief croupier to protect her from these thieves and drive them out of the place. So they were kicked out, in spite of all their cries and protests. They both yelled at once, tried to prove that granny owed them money, and had deceived them, and behaved dishonestly and meanly towards them.

Poor Potápitch told me all this with the tears streaming from his eyes, the same evening ; and assured me that he had seen these miserable wretches over and over again seize handfuls of granny's money and stuff their pockets with it in the most bare-faced way. Besides this, the scoundrels would beg or borrow five friedrichs d'or from granny and immediately stake the money next to granny's stake. If the old lady's venture won, they would protest that theirs was the winning stake and that granny's had lost.

When the wretches were kicked out, Potápitch came forward

and gave notice that their pockets were full of money. Granny requested the croupier to take the necessary steps, and in spite of the yells of the two Poles (who shrieked like a couple of cocks just captured), the police came and emptied their pockets for granny's benefit. Granny had the protection and support, after this and until she was entirely cleared out, of the croupiers and officials generally.

Gradually, the news of granny and her exploits crept over the town ; and all the visitors at the waters—people of every nationality—crowded in to see this "*Vieille comtesse Russe, tombée en enfance*," a poor old Russian countess, who was in her second childhood, and who had already lost "several millions." But poor granny gained very little by her deliverance from the two Poles.

In place of these gentlemen, a third Pole immediately entered her service, a person who spoke Russian fluently, dressed like a gentleman, though looking remarkably like a waiter, with long whiskers and a moustache. This gentleman was also an aristocratic Pole, very patriotic and proud of his nationality ; but he was extremely ungentlemanly and discourteous to all around him, all the same ; and as for being in granny's service, it was very soon made quite clear that he was not only *not* her servant, but was most unequivocally her master and tyrant. Every other moment he would turn to granny and vow, with terrible oaths, that he was a most honourable Polish Pan, and was quite above defrauding her of a single farthing. He repeated these oaths so frequently and continuously that poor granny became quite frightened ; but as this mighty Pan really seemed to improve her game at first, and as she actually commenced to win a little at this period, she had no excuse for getting rid of the fellow.

An hour or so after they had been turned out, the other two Poles appeared again, and stood behind granny's chair, loudly offering their services in any capacity. Potápitch solemnly swore that he saw the honourable Pan making signs to these two men, and he even declared that he saw him putting something into their hands. As poor granny had had no dinner, and nothing to eat all day, one of the Poles was useful in running off to the refreshment room, whence he brought the old lady a cup of bouillon and a roll, and afterwards some tea. They both went for these refreshments. At the end of the day, when everybody was aware of the fact that poor granny had

lost everything, and had changed her last Russian security, there were not *two* but *six* Poles standing behind her chair—men who had been neither seen nor heard of until then.

When granny was on her very last legs, staking her few remaining thousands of guldens, these wretched creatures all crowded around and about her, quarrelling, laughing, and talking to the honourable Pan—staking the old lady's money promiscuously and without the slightest order or system, taking no notice whatever of poor granny, bending over her, and jogging her—as though forgetful or ignorant of her very existence. Even when she had lost her last farthing and was being carried away home, three or four Poles accompanied her, running along beside her chair at both sides, and shouting that granny had cheated them and owed them money, which she had promised them and never paid up. This sort of thing was kept up until the hotel was reached, when, of course, they were very promptly and very unceremoniously kicked out, without much respect for their aristocratic persons.

Potápitch calculated that granny must have lost on this fatal day, *besides* her losses of the previous evening, about ninety thousand roubles. All her securities, her five per cents, her "interior loans," and her stock, all she had with her, had been changed one after the other.

I was surprised that she had been able to bear the fatigue of sitting there for seven or eight hours, never so much as moving from her place at the board; but Potápitch explained that three several times she certainly had begun to win in a marvellous way; and that, filled with new hope by these successes, she had been unable to tear herself away from the fascinating game. Card-players know full well how possible, how *easy* it is to sit all day over the cards and never move from one place—never even let one's eyes wander to the right or to the left of the all-absorbing game they are engaged in.

Great and important things were in the meantime happening at the hotel all day, among our people. In the morning, about eleven o'clock, before granny had started on her last fatal expedition to the Vauxhall, the general and De Grier had resolved upon a final and decisive move. Learning that granny had no idea of leaving, but intended going off to the roulette-table again, they decided, in full family conclave (Paulina excepted), to proceed straight to her and "have it out" finally and even candidly.

The general, in a dreadful state of terror and nervousness, at the thought of the fearful consequences of failure in this move, began with tears and prayers, but eventually boiled over. After half-an-hour's petitioning and entreaty, and confession of everything—I mean of all his debts, and even of his passion for Miss Blanche—he quite lost his head. He suddenly adopted a tone of severity, and shouted and stamped his foot at granny. He cried that she was shaming her family, that she was making herself a public scandal, and lastly, “and lastly, madam, you are putting the Russian name to open shame!” he yelled; “and let me remind you that there is such a thing as a police force, and—and—” Here granny drove him out of the room with her stick—a good thick one it was too.

The general and De Grier took counsel together two or three times that morning, and the text of their confabulations was “couldn’t the police force really be brought into requisition? Couldn’t we state that here is a poor unfortunate but honourable old lady, who has gone out of her mind and is now gambling away the last relics of her fortune; in a word, could not some influence be worked upon to secure some sort of restraint upon her actions, or a formal prohibition to visit the roulette saloon?”

But De Grier only shrugged his shoulders and laughed at the general, who, poor old man, had, apparently, quite gone out of his mind, and walked up and down the room in a state of most pitiable despair and helplessness. At last De Grier had made a gesture expressive of consigning everybody and everything to perdition, and stalked out of the room.

In the evening it became known that he had left the hotel and gone away somewhere, after having had a most important, decisive, and secret consultation with Miss Blanche.

As for Miss Blanche herself, she took final and absolute measures of her own from an early hour of the morning. She had now thrown over the general completely, and would not either look at him, or permit him to see her. When the general went off post haste to the Vauxhall to find her, and met her on the prince’s arm, neither Miss Blanche nor Madame Veuve de Cominges recognised him; they both cut him dead. The prince did not bow to him either.

All day Blanche worked upon the little prince, doing her best to make him speak out decidedly. But, alas! she was very much mistaken in her calculations with regard to this small

nobleman. A minor catastrophe came about this very evening; it turned out that the prince was as poor as a magpie and that he had counted upon borrowing money from Blanche at interest, and against his bills, in order to go and have a turn at the roulette-table. Blanche kicked him out in wrath, and shut herself up in her own room.

In the morning of the same day, I went over to Mr. Astley's; that is, I spent the whole morning looking for Mr. Astley, but did not find him. He wasn't in the Vauxhall, he wasn't in the park, he wasn't at home. He did not dine at his hotel this particular afternoon, as usual. But about five o'clock I saw him coming from the railway station, and making straight for the *Hôtel d'Angleterre*. He was in a hurry, and he was—I was sure—much preoccupied, although one could not detect anything particular in his face, one never could.

He held out his hand to me joyously, and with his usual exclamation, "Ah!" but he did not stop for a moment, and went on walking fast towards the hotel. I joined him, but he was so cunning in his answers to me that I could not even ask him exactly what I wanted to know. Besides, I was—somehow or other—dreadfully shy of talking about Paulina; and he himself did not say a word about her. I told him all about granny. He listened seriously and attentively and shrugged his shoulders.

"She will lose everything," I said.

"Oh yes," he said, "of course! she was on her way to the table when I left, and I knew at the time, very well indeed, how it would be; if I have the opportunity I shall call in at the saloon and see how she's getting on; it will be a most curious and interesting spectacle."

"Where have you been to?" I inquired, amazed at myself for not having asked him this before.

"I've been to Frankfort."

"On business?"

"Yes, on business."

Well, it was no use my pumping him any further. However, I continued to walk along at his side; but he suddenly turned into a hotel which we were passing called the "*Hôtel des Quatre Saisons*," nodded his head, and disappeared.

Arrived at home, I gradually realised that if I had continued to talk to him for a couple of hours together I should have got nothing more out of him, for the simple reason that I had

nothing whatever to ask him about. Of course I had not. Even now I could not for the life of me formulate any question which I should have liked to put to him.

All this day Paulina either walked with the children and the nurse about the park, or else sat at home. She had long since taken to avoiding the general; and scarcely ever spoke a word to him nowadays, certainly not a serious word. I had noticed this for some time; but knowing the general's condition to-day, I thought he could not surely avoid her altogether, there *must* be some sort of important family understanding arrived at between them before nightfall. Yet when I arrived at the hotel after my talk with Mr. Astley, and met Paulina and the children, there was such an expression of unruffled calm upon her face that she looked as though all these fierce family storms had passed her over completely.

She replied to my bow with a nod of the head; and I reached my room in a state of spiteful irritation. Of course I had avoided talking to her, I had not once spoken a single word to her since the Warmerholm adventure. I was half in earnest and half playing the tom-fool in this avoidance of her at first, but as the time went by I became more and more seriously irritated with her. Even though she had not the faintest particle of love for me, I thought, still she need not, surely, ride rough shod thus over my feelings, and treat my honest affection for her with such absolute disdain as this.

She knows well enough that I love her sincerely. She allowed me to tell her so. All this intimacy between us certainly did begin very strangely. It was like this: Some time before, about a couple of months ago, I had noticed that she seemed to wish to make a friend of me—a trusted ally—and that she was trying me; but this style of thing did not work with us, and in place of it there sprang up the present strange relations, which had resulted in my speaking to her as I did.

But if my love *was* objectionable to her, why had she not forbidden me to speak of it, altogether? I was not forbidden to speak of it. On the contrary, she had very often challenged me, as it were, to a conversation, and—but, of course, all this was her way of amusing herself. I know for certain, I had often remarked it, and carefully, that she actually *enjoyed* at times to listen to my wild words of passion, during which I was nearly beside myself with agitation, and then sud-

denly to mortify me with some action or expression of her unutterable contempt and disdain for my person. And she knows well enough that I cannot live without her ! Why, here are no more than three days passed since my tom-foolery with the baron, and I can scarcely bear our "separation," even for that short space of time. When I met her to-day at the Vauxhall, my heart beat so fearfully that I knew I became quite white. But she will never get on without me, either, oh, no ! I am necessary to her—I feel that. •She *needs* me ; and surely, surely not simply as her clown. She has a secret, that's very clear. That conversation of hers with granny stabbed me to the heart. Thousands of times have I challenged her to be open with me and tell me all, and she must know that I am ready, happy, at any moment, to lay down my very life for her. And yet she has always treated my words with the greatest possible show of contempt, and instead of the sacrifice of my life which I offered her, she exacts foolish sallies from me such as that tom-foolery with the baron. Who in the world could bear that sort of thing quietly ?

Surely, surely her whole world is not centred in this Frenchman ? And how about Mr. Astley ? Ah, there I can't understand anything whatever ; I am absolutely and hopelessly in the dark ; and meanwhile—good God, how I suffer ! what agonies of mind I am going through ! —

Arrived at home, in a paroxysm of rage, I seized a pen and wrote to her as follows :

" Paulina Alexandrovna,—I see plainly that a crisis is about to come upon us, which will not pass *you* by, any more than the rest of us. For the last time I repeat, *do* you or *do* you *not* require my life, my head ? If you do need me *for anything*, make your arrangements, and meanwhile I shall hardly move out of my room, and shall not leave the hotel. If you want me, either write or send for me."

I sealed the letter and sent it by the waifer attached to my floor of the hotel, telling him particularly that it was to be delivered into Paulina's own hands. I did not expect any answer ; but three minutes later the man returned and informed me that the lady instructed him to "express her thanks."

At about seven o'clock, I was sent for to the general's. He was in his study, and was dressed as though just ready to go out. His hat and stick were beside him on a sofa. It appeared

to me, when I entered, that he was standing with bent head in the middle of the room, talking aloud to himself; but the moment he saw me, he rushed to me, almost with a cry, so that I was downright startled, and stepped back with the intention of moving off again; but he seized me by the hand, and dragged me to the sofa. He then sat down on the latter himself, and forced me into an arm-chair immediately opposite, never letting go of my hands the while, and with trembling lips and tears, which suddenly appeared sparkling on his eyelashes, and in a voice of the most abject entreaty, he said :

“Alexey Ivanovitch, preserve me! Save me! save me!”

At last, however, I gathered that he required me to give him some sort of advice, or, to be more correct, he had found himself alone, and nervous, and excited, and deserted by all, and had suddenly betbrought him of me, and sent for me, in order to be able to talk and talk and talk to somebody or other!

He was bewildered and confused to the last degree. He had arrived at such a pass that he clasped his hands, and was ready to fall at my knees and entreat me (you'll hardly believe it) to go to Miss Blanche and implore her, and advise her, and persuade her to come back to him, and to be his wife.

“But, my dear general,” I protested, “Miss Blanche has never so much as noticed my existence up to this day—what can I do?”

However, it was quite useless saying a word. The old fellow was quite beyond either listening to or understanding what was said to him. He commenced to talk about granny, too, but quite disconnectedly; he still cherished the idea of getting the police to interfere.

“In our country, in our country,” he said, suddeley boiling over with rage, “where there’s a properly organized system for keeping order, they would establish a guardianship immediately over such old women as that! Yes, my dear sir, yes!” he continued, suddenly changing his tone to a sort of severe lecturing style, and addressing some imaginary “dear sirs” in the corner of the room, while he walked excitedly up and down, and up and down again, “yes, my dear sir, and so you shall find out. Old women like that ought to be driven out into the fields—yes, sir, into the fields—the fields!—oh, *damn* the whole thing!” And he threw himself down on the sofa again. But next minute he was sobbing and panting and telling me hurriedly that the reason Blanche had left him and would not marry him

now was, that instead of his receiving a telegram announcing granny's death, granny herself had turned up ; and that it was only too clear now that he would not get her money. He seemed to think that I knew nothing of all this as yet. I began to speak of De Grier ; but he made a gesture of the hand :

" He's gone, and all my property is pawned to him. I'm as naked as a magpie ! Of the money you brought—of that money I think—I don't quite know—I think there's about seven hundred francs left, and that's all, sir, that's all—quite enough too, isn't it, eh?—and beyond that I can tell nothing, sir, nothing whatever ! "

" But what are you going to do about your hotel bill ? " I cried in some alarm, " and—and afterwards ? "

He regarded me thoughtfully ; but I don't think he understood, or even listened to what I was saying. I tried to lead the conversation to Paulina, to the children ; he looked up hurriedly and replied :

" Yes, yes," and then immediately broke off, and commenced to speak about the prince, remarking that he was afraid Blanche would not go away with the former, " and then, and then—oh what am I to do, Alexey Ivanovitch ? what am I to do ? I swear, sir, this is ingratitude, this is the basest ingratitude."

At last he burst into a flood of tears. There was nothing to be done with a man like this ; it was dangerous to leave him quite alone, for it was only too likely that he might do something terrible. However, I got away from him as best I could, and told the nurse to go in there and see after him as often as she had time ; besides which I asked the waiter, who was a very decent sort of a fellow, to look after the old man a little, and he promised to keep a good look-out over him.

I had hardly left the general when Potápitch came for me, with a request from granny that I should come at once to her room. It was eight o'clock, and she had just returned from the roulette saloon, after her last and fatal visit, during which she had been entirely cleared out. I went there and found the poor old lady sitting back in her arm-chair, looking quite dead beat, and decidedly ill. Martha had brought her a cup of tea, and was almost forcing her to drink it. Granny's voice and expression had changed terribly.

" How d'ye do, Alexey Ivanovitch," she said slowly, and with a polite bend of her old head ; " excuse my bothering you again ; you will forgive a poor old woman, I'm sure. Well, my lad,

I've left all my money there—nearly a hundred thousand roubles. You were quite right not to go with me last night; now I am quite penniless. I haven't a farthing left here. I don't want to dawdle in this place any longer, not a single minute; at half-past nine I shall start. I have just sent over to your English friend, Mr. Astley, and asked him for the loan of three thousand francs for a week; would you kindly see him and take care that he doesn't misunderstand me, or refuse me the money? I am still rich enough, you know, my friend; I still possess three villages and a couple of houses in town—yes, and I have money besides; I didn't bring it all with me. I'm telling you this so that Astley should not be afraid of advancing me the little sum I want, and—why, here he is himself! What a good fellow he is!"

Mr. Astley had hastened to come at the first intimation from the old lady. Without a thought of delay, and without a word, he counted out three thousand francs, for which she gave him her acknowledgment. This matter over, he bowed and retired as hastily as he had come.

"And now you go, too, Alexey Ivanovitch; I've only an hour more before the train starts, and I wish to lie down, my bones are aching. Don't call me to account for my foolishness. I shall never accuse young people of being silly, never again, and I should think it sinful now to blame even that poor old general of yours. I shall not give him any money, though, all the same, for I consider him too stupid a man to have money in his power—not that I'm any better myself, old fool that I am! Wicked fool! God punishes the proud even in old age. Well, good-bye, my lad; here, Martha, lift me up."

I should have liked to see granny off. I was in that state of mind when one feels that something is going to happen at every moment. I could not sit still in my room. I went out, and walked up and down the passage; I even had a little turn in the avenue. My letter to Paulina was plain and decided enough, surely; and there was no mistake about the present catastrophe being a real one: I heard about De Grier's departure down-stairs. Well, if she does refuse to have anything to do with me as a friend, she won't reject me as her slave, *at all events*. Why, she *must* need me; I *must* be of some use to her; if I can't do anything but carry parcels about for her, at least I can do that—of course I can! At the time for the departure of granny's train, I went down to the station and put

the old lady into the carriage. They were all together in a special saloon carriage.

"Thanks, my dear boy, for your disinterested kindness," she said, as the train moved off; "and look here, remind Paulina of what we were speaking about yesterday; I shall expect her."

I went home. Afterwards, as I passed the general's door, I met the nurse and asked her how the master was?

"Oh, he's all right," she said, dejectedly.

However, I thought I might as well go in and see; but at the door I suddenly paused in real amazement; Miss Blanche and the general were together inside, laughing merrily over something. Madame Veuve de Cominges was also there, sitting on the sofa. The general was evidently beside himself with joy; he was talking all sorts of nonsense, and continually breaking into peals of nervous laughter, his whole face dividing itself into countless wrinkles, and his eyes entirely disappearing as he laughed.

Afterwards I learned from Blanche herself that, having driven the prince away, and hearing of the poor general's grief, she had called in for a minute or two to comfort him. The old fellow was not aware, however, that his fate was sealed, and that Blanche was in the midst of her packing, so as to be ready to flit to Paris by the first early train to-morrow morning.

As I stood at the general's threshold, I thought I would not enter the room, after all; and I backed out again without having been observed. I then went upstairs to my own room. Arrived there, I thought I saw, in the semi darkness, some figure or other seated in a chair by the window in the furthest corner. The figure did not rise at my approach. I advanced quickly towards it—looked, and my soul seemed to become paralysed within me; it was Paulina!

CHAPTER XIV.

I UTTERED a cry of surprise. "What's the matter—what is it?" she asked, in a strange tone. She was very pale, and her face wore a gloomy, dejected look.

"What is it? Why, you—to be here, in this room, *mine*!"

"If I come at all, I come altogether. It is my way. You shall see what I mean presently. Light a candle."

I lit a candle. She rose, came to the table and placed an open letter before me."

"Read that," she said.

"That--that's De Grier's writing," I cried, seizing the letter. My hands trembled, and I seemed to see a shower of stars dancing before my eyes, together with the written words. I forgot the exact wording of the letter; but this is something like it--if not word for word, it is at all events thought for thought:

"Mademoiselle," wrote De Grier, "unpleasant circumstances compel me to take my departure at once. You have, of course, observed that I have avoided a final understanding with yourself up to this time, because I was awaiting the upshot of all these matters. The arrival of the old lady, your relative, and her foolish actions have quite removed any doubts I may have held. My own embarrassed financial condition precludes me from any longer indulging those sweet hopes in which I allowed myself to revel for a certain period; I very deeply regret the past, and trust that you will not see in my conduct anything inconsistent with your ideas of a gentleman and an honest man. Having lost nearly all my possessions in loans to your step-father, I find myself at this moment absolutely compelled to realise what I still have left me; and I have written to my friends in St. Petersburg requesting them to sell, at once, all the property mortgaged in my favour in that capital. Knowing, however, that your weak-minded stepfather has squandered not only his own but also *your* money, I have excused him fifty thousand francs of his debt to me, and have returned him mortgages of his property to this amount; you can now, therefore, receive back all you have lost through him, by suing him for the value of your property at law. I hope, mademoiselle, that under existing circumstances my action may prove beneficial to yourself. I hope, also, that in this action I am fulfilling the obligations of an honest and generous man. Be assured that the memory of you is for ever sealed within my heart of hearts."

"Well, this is all quite clear," I said, turning to Paulina; "surely you did not expect anything else?" I added, irritably.

"I did not expect anything at all," she replied, with apparent composure, but something in her voice was suggestive of a

tremble. "I had long come to a decision about *him*. I read his thoughts, and I knew well what he was fancying. He thought that I wished—that I should *insist*—" She did not finish the sentence, but bit her lip hard and was silent. Then she went on :

"I purposely redoubled my contempt for the man, and waited to see what would happen. If the telegram about a legacy for me had come, I should have thrown the amount of that idiot's (my stepfather's) debt in his face, and kicked him out of the house. I have long loathed, detested the man. Oh ! he was not like this *once*—he was a thousand, a thousand times different once !—but now,—oh, with what *joy* I would take these fifty thousand francs and hurl them in the scoundrel's face, and *split* at him—."

"But these mortgages for fifty thousand francs, which he says he has returned to the general? Get them back and send them to De Grier."

"Oh, it's not that, it's not that."

"No, you are right, it's not that," I said; "besides, the general is fit for nothing just now. What about granny?" I asked, suddenly.

"Why, granny?" she said, quickly, and with an expression of annoyance; "I can't go to granny; besides, I don't wish to apologise to any one," she added, excitedly.

"Well, what's to be done?" I cried. "...oh, *how, how*, could you ever have loved that De Grier—that scoundrel, that blackguard of a fellow? Look here—do you wish me to shoot him in a duel?—yes or no? Where is he now?"

"He's at Frankfort, and will stay there three days."

"One word from you and I'm off," I said, "I will start to-morrow by the earliest train." I spoke under the influence of a stupid sort of enthusiasm.

She laughed.

"Why, he'll probably say: 'First give me back the fifty thousand francs; ' besides, he wouldn't fight. But what nonsense this is."

"Well, where shall I get hold of fifty thousand francs?" I repeated, gnashing my teeth with helpless rage, just as though I had expected to be able to pick up the money from the floor. "Listen ! how about Mr. Astley?" I asked, communicating a sudden strange idea to her, before I had myself half developed it. Her eyes flashed.

"What, do *you yourself* wish me to appeal to Mr. Astley instead of to *you*?" she said, searching my face with a scrutinising look, and smiling bitterly. I believe her head must have been giddy from agitation at the moment, for she suddenly sat down on the sofa, looking as though she were about to faint.

I felt as though I had been struck by lightning. I stood motionless, and could believe neither my eyes nor my ears.

"What," I thought, "is it possible that *she loves me*? She has come to me and not to Mr. Astley. She, a girl, and alone, has come to my room here, in a public hotel—in a word, she has compromised herself before the world—and here am I standing like a boy before her, I don't understand her—."

A wild thought suddenly shot through my brain. "Paulina, give me one hour. Wait here just *one* little hour and I'll come back. It's—it's absolutely necessary; you shall see—don't go away." And I rushed out of the room without any response to her astonished and inquiring look. She called out something to me as I ran off, but I did not turn back.

Yes! sometimes a wild idea takes such firm hold upon one's imagination and feelings that, impossible and absurd though it be, one accepts it at last as having the stamp of feasibility and reason. Not only that, but if one's wishes, one's strong desires, happen to coincide with the idea, one recognises the latter as something foreordained, fated—inevitable, as a thing which *must be*, and cannot possibly be non-existent.

At all events, on this particular evening (which I shall never forget all my life), there happened to me, as the result of my wild idea, something which I thought absolutely magical, and think so still.

And why, why had this certainty taken such firm, deep hold upon me so long before? for I tell you I thought of this thing, not like other matters which might happen or might *not*, but as a matter which was decided already, and which *must* come to pass. It was a quarter past ten. I entered the Vauxhall in such a state of fluttering hope, and, at the same time, in such dreadful agitation, as I had never before experienced. There was a large number of people still in the gambling-hall, though not nearly so many as had been present in the morning.

By eleven o'clock, there remain at the roulette table only those desperate players, the real gamblers, for whom there

exists but the roulette-table at these watering-places ; who only come here for roulette : who know nothing of what is going on around them, and take no interest in any matters outside the roulette saloon, but only play and play from morning till night, and would gladly play all round the clock if it were permitted. These people are always annoyed when twelve o'clock at night comes, and they must go home, because the roulette bank is closed. And when the chief croupier, about twelve o'clock, just before the close, calls out, "*Les trois derniers coups, messieurs !*" (the last three turns, gentlemen), these men are ready to stake all they have in their pockets on those last three turns, and it is certain that it is just then that people lose the most.

I made straight for the table where granny had been seated some time before. It was not very much crowded, so I easily secured standing room near the game.

Straight in front of my nose, the word "*Passé*" was imprinted on the green cloth. *Passé* is the term for the combination of numbers from 19 to 36 inclusive. The first group of numbers, that comprising 1 to 18 inclusive, is known as "*Manque*."

But what had I to do with all this? I didn't care, I didn't think, I didn't even *hear* what the last call had been ; I did not ask any questions as to the previous turns of the wheel in order to make my calculations of an average, but I began to play like the veriest tyro in the room ; I pulled out my twenty fried richs d'or, and put them all upon the word "*Passé*," which happened to be just under my nose.

"Twenty-two!" cried the croupier.

I won ; and again staked my original sum, *plus* the money I had just gained.

"Thirty-one!" cried the croupier.

I had won again. That made eighty friedrich d'or in all.

I staked the whole thing on the twelve middle numbers (if this turned out right I should win three times my stake, but the chances were two to one against me). The wheel turned, and the croupier called out, "Twenty-four!" I had won again ; the money was passed over to me in neat packets of fifty friedrichs d'or. I had gained over two hundred gold pieces.

I was now in a high fever of excitement, and staked my whole fortune on red, and then I suddenly recollected myself.

Only once, this whole eventful evening, did I feel the sensation of fear steal through my veins like an icy current, and make my hands and limbs shake as with a palsy. It had struck me suddenly, "What would *losing* mean for me just now?" All, my very life, was staked at this moment on one chance.

"*Rouge!*" cried the croupier, and I breathed again. I felt a tingling sensation all through my body.

This time I was paid in bank-notes principally. I now had four thousand florins and eighty friedrichs d'or besides. (At this time I could still carry the account accurately in my head.)

After this, I remember, I staked two thousand florins on the twelve middle numbers, and lost. Then I staked all the gold I had, besides the eighty friedrichs d'or, and lost again. Rage got the better of me. I seized the remaining two thousand florins, and staked all on the twelve first numbers, anyhow, I didn't care where my money fell on the table. I had made no calculation of the chances. Then there was one moment of expectation, something like, probably, what Madame Blanchard felt, vivid impressions following one upon another, when she and her balloon fell to the earth in the streets of Paris.

"*Quatre!*" cried the croupier.

Now, I possessed in all six thousand florins, together with my stake. I looked about me like a conqueror. I was no longer afraid of anything whatever, and I threw down a stake of four thousand florins upon black. Eight or nine other players seeing my stake, followed my example, and went upon black too. The croupiers exchanged glances, and had a talk in secret conclave.

All those around the table stood waiting, and chatted among themselves. At last the game re-commenced.

"*Black!*" cried the croupier.

After this, I remember neither my stakes nor my account. I can only recall that I had won by this time about sixteen thousand florins; then, suddenly, in three unlucky shots, I lost twelve thousand of these; then I put my last four thousand once more on "*passe*." I did not feel anything at this time; I was no longer anxious or nervous; I only awaited events in a state of numbed consciousness, playing mechanically. I won again. Then I won four times in succession. All I can remember of this period is that I raked in my money by thousands, and that the luck seemed to cling to the twelve middle

numbers, and that I therefore stuck to this combination principally. These numbers appeared to turn up regularly, three or four times in succession without failing; then they would disappear for a couple of times or so, and then reappear again for two or three turns in succession.

This extraordinary regularity does sometimes happen in games of absolute chance; and it is this fact which throws out all those scientific gamblers and their calculations and systems, the men who sit around with their pencils in their hands, and play by rule of average.

And gracious heaven! what tricks does fate sometimes play in these halls of chance. I think about half-an-hour—not more—had passed since my arrival, when suddenly the croupier informed me that I had won thirty thousand florins, and that as the bank was not answerable for more than this sum at one sitting, this particular table must be closed until to-morrow morning.

I seized all my gold and crammed it into my pocket, crunched up the mass of paper money lying before me in my hand, and instantly made over to another table in the next room. The whole troupe of players followed me, and a place was instantly made for me at the new table. Here I recommenced my tactics of staking wildly and without the slightest order or system; I cannot understand what saved me.

At certain moments, however, some vague idea of intention and choice guided me. I would stake on certain numbers and colours with some little order for a few minutes at a time, and then again recommenced my wild, lavish, almost unconscious flinging away of money on any chance that happened to strike my fancy at the moment.

I should think I must have been uncommonly careless, because I remember the croupiers very often had to arrange my stakes on the board for me, in so slip-shod a way had I thrown the money down. I made some terrible blunders. My temples were wet with perspiration and my hands were all of a tremble. The ubiquitous Poles had been buzzing about me offering me their services over and over again, but I neither listened to them nor took any notice of them.

The luck did not change; on I went—always winning. Suddenly a loud laugh and clatter of tongues arose around the table:

“Bravo, bravo!” cried everyone present; many even clapped their hands.

I had won thirty thousand florins here, too ; and a second table had to shut up for the night.

“ Go away, go away,” whispered some voice at my right ear. This was a certain Frankfort Jew, who had stood beside me all the while I had been playing, and had helped me considerably, I think, in my arrangements.

“ For heaven’s sake go away,” whispered another voice, at my left this time.

I looked round ; it was a pretty, modest-looking lady, very well dressed, of something under thirty years old, with a very pale, tired-looking face, full, as it were, of the recollections of a former marvellous beauty.

At this moment I was cramming the bank-notes into my pockets, tumbling them in anyhow, and collecting the remains of the gold left on the table. Seizing the last packet of fifty friedrichs d’or, I found an opportunity to press it into the pale lady’s hand, unnoticed ; I felt irresistibly drawn to do this ; and I remember how her thin, long fingers pressed my hand in token of her lively gratitude. All this took place in a single instant. I collected all my money and made for the room where *trente-et-quarante* was being played.

It is an aristocratic set that sits over the *trente-et-quarante* tables. This is not roulette, it is a game of cards. Here the bank is responsible for a hundred thousand florins at a time, and the maximum stake, as at roulette, is four thousand florins. I knew nothing whatever of the game, hardly, even knew how to stake, excepting on the red and black, which stake exists in this game as in roulette. So I clung to the red and black stakes. The whole company present in the Vauxhall crowded around me.

I cannot remember whether I ever once thought of Paulina all this time. I know I felt a sort of frantic satisfaction in handling and raking up the bank-notes, the heap of which at my side kept growing ever higher and higher. Assuredly, fate seemed to be on my side. This time there occurred a circumstance which—however exceptional—is by no means unprecedented in the game ; at all events, as though for the sake of consistency, this phenomenon ranged itself on my side to-night —I mean, the luck seemed to attach itself to one colour, and would not leave it sometimes for ten or fifteen times in succession.

I heard the other day that, one evening last week, the red

was called twenty-two times running. Such a thing was not remembered to have occurred before, and it produced a great sensation.

Of course, in a case like this, no one staked on red ; and in point of fact, after a colour has turned up ten times in succession, no sensible person ever does risk staking upon it for an eleventh turn. At the same time, the experienced player will not stake on black either in such a case ; he knows too well what this sort of "wilful irony of fate" means.

For instance, supposing that red has turned up sixteen times in succession, before the next shot young players and novices will crowd their money upon black, doubling and trebling their stakes, in the belief that black must undoubtedly have its turn next—and the result is, a sad disappointment and the loss a smart one. But I, through the influence of some inexplicable, strange wilfulness, noticing that red had been up seven times running, determined to go on staking on the same colour. I feel sure that vanity played a great part in my feelings and actions during this period; I longed to astonish the spectators by my wild risks and strange daring. I remember quite well how a sort of thirst for risking largely got possession of me. Perhaps the mind, passing from sensation to sensation, and only becoming more excited with its bee-like visits, grows more and more thirsty for further sensations—each one more vivid and keener than the last—until it has satisfaction, and sinks, as it were, tired, to rest.

And—and this is no lie, but pure truth—if the laws of the game had permitted me to stake fifty thousand florins at a time, instead of four thousand, I should most assuredly have done so. So I continued to stake upon red.

The people around me all commenced crying out that it was absurd to continue—senseless ! "Red has been called fourteen times without a break !" they exclaimed.

"The gentleman has won a hundred thousand florins already !" cried some one beside me.

I started, and seemed to come to myself all of a sudden. What ? Had I won a *hundred thousand florins* this evening ? What should I want any more for ? I seized my bank notes and crushed them into my pocket, without counting them ; I laid hold of all my *rouleaux* and loose gold, and rushed out of the saloon.

Everyone laughed, I remember, as I passed through the rooms

with my pockets bulged out with the notes, and my feet tottering under the weight of the gold. I should think there must have been considerably more than twenty pounds of it altogether. Many hands were stretched out to me for gratuities; I gave without looking and without a thought of the amount, grasping whatever I could hold and placing it in the hands outstretched to receive it. Two Jews were standing at the outer doors, and stopped me:

"You are very bold—very bold," they said; "but you had better leave the place to-morrow morning as early as possible; otherwise you will lose every farthing."

I did not listen to them. . . . The avenue was so dark that one could not see one's hand held immediately in front of one's nose. It was about a quarter of a mile to the hotel. I had never been afraid of thieves or robbers, even when a boy; I never so much as gave such vermin a thought now. I do not remember what I mused about on the way home—I don't think I had any thoughts at all. I only felt a sort of immeasurable satisfaction, that of success, of victory, of power—I don't know how to express the feeling.

The picture of Paulina floated before my mind's eye too. I remembered and was aware that I was on my way to *her*; that in a moment or two I should be with her, and tell her all about it and show her my prize; still I hardly recalled the reason why I had rushed off to the roulette-table to play, and what she had said to me just before.

And all those sensations of half an hour since seemed now to belong to a long-passed period of time, a period done with and buried—a period of which we should never think—which we should never recall again, because a new era had begun and we must now start afresh.

But when I had almost reached the end of the avenue a great dread suddenly fell upon me: "What if I should be murdered and robbed?" With every step this dread seemed to be redoubled; I nearly ran with fright. Suddenly, at the end of the avenue, the hotel with all its blaze of light, started up before my eyes. Thank God—at home! I rushed upstairs to my room and opened the door quickly.

Paulina was still there. She was sitting on my sofa before the lighted candle, with her arms folded.

She gazed at me in amazement, and certainly I must have

been a strange looking object at this moment. I stood in front of her and commenced to discharge my cargo of money on to the table before her.

CHAPTER XV.

I REMEMBER she stared at me with marvellous intensity ; but she did not rise from her place, she did not even change her position.

"I have won two hundred thousand francs," I cried, as I threw down the last packet.

The huge pile of notes and gold occupied the whole table ; I could not take my eyes off it. At moments I entirely forgot all about Paulina. Now I would begin to arrange the banknotes in order ; now I would sweep the gold into one heap ; then I would give up this occupation and take to walking up and down the room with long strides ; then I would recollect myself and come back to the table and begin to count the money once more.

Suddenly a thought seemed to strike me, and I rushed to the door and locked it, turning the key twice. Then I stopped and reflected before my small portmanteau.

"Shall I put it all away in the portmanteau until to-morrow ?" I said, suddenly turning towards Paulina and recollecting her presence.

She continued to sit in the same spot, motionless, but intently watched every movement I made. The expression of her face was very strange. I did not like it much. I shall not be far wrong if I say that there was *hate* in it. I approached her quickly :

"Paulina, here are twenty-five thousand florins—that means fifty thousand francs—rather more ; take them and throw them in his face to-morrow."

She did not reply.

"If you like," I continued, "I will do it myself to-morrow morning. Shall I ?"

She suddenly burst out laughing, and continued laughing for a long time. I looked at her with amazement, and with a

feeling of offended pride. This laugh was much too like her frequent ironical sneer of old days at my expense—the laugh which had always followed my most passionate sallies.

At last she stopped laughing, and frowned, looking severely at me from under her eyelashes.

“I won’t have your money,” she said, disdainfully.

“What, why not?” I cried. “Paulina, why not?”

“I don’t take money for nothing.”

“I offer it you as your friend; I offer you my whole life.”

She gazed at me long and intently, as though she wished to penetrate and pierce me through and through with those eyes of hers.

“You are paying too dear,” she said at last, smiling. “De Grier’s lover is not worth fifty thousand francs.”

“Paulina, how can you talk so to me?” I cried. “I am not a De Grier.”

“I hate you—yes, I do. I don’t love you any better than De Grier,” she exclaimed, with flashing eyes.

At this point she covered her face with her hands, and relapsed into a fit of hysterical crying. I rushed up to her. I was quite certain something had happened to her while I was away; she was not herself.

“Buy me! buy me! will you, do you want me? Will you buy me for fifty thousand francs like De Grier?” she sobbed, with great gulps of hysterical laughter, and crying between every word. I embraced her, I kissed her hands, her feet. I fell on my knees before her. Her hysterical fit passed off.

She placed both hands on my shoulders, and gazed intently and fixedly into my eyes; it seemed as though she wished to read something in them. She listened to me, but evidently did not hear what I said to her. A sort of intense and pre-occupied expression came over her face; I became very much alarmed for her; it appeared to me that she was actually going out of her mind.

One moment she would draw me gently to her, and a trustful smile would light up her eyes; then she would put me away from her again, and with a gloomy, angry look, she would recommence gazing, and gazing at me, as before. Suddenly she began embracing me:

“Why, you love me, you love me?” she said. “Why, you—why, you—wanted to fight the baron for my sake,” and she burst out laughing again, just as though something both funny

and yet dear to her had at that moment struck her. She cried and laughed at the same time. What on earth was I to do? I myself was in a high state of fever. I recollect she began to tell me something or other, but I could not for the life of me make out what it was she wished to communicate. It was a sort of raving, a wild rigmarole, just as though she was anxious to tell me the news, whatever it might be, as quickly as ever she could—a delirium, broken by peals of joyous laughter at times, and altogether a species of mad chatter, which filled me with the greatest alarm.

“No, no—you are my darling, my darling!” she repeated. “You are my faithful knight!”

And once more she placed both hands on my shoulders, and gazed and gazed into my eyes, and once more she recommenced murmuring:

“You do love me, yes—you love me; and you *will* love me, won’t you?”

I never took my eyes off her. This was the first time I had ever seen her in these paroxysms of love and tenderness. Of course, it was all delirium, but— At last, observing my passionate gaze, she suddenly broke off into a sort of cunning laugh; and, without rhyme or reason, commenced to talk about Mr. Astley. In point of fact, she had spoken about Mr. Astley before, especially just at that time when she had been trying so hard to tell me something or other in her raving, unintelligible jargon. She kept repeating that he was waiting for her; and did I know that, at this very moment, he was under the window, standing and looking up for her.

“Yes, yes—he’s here, here—under this very window. Open it, and look out, and you’ll see him standing there.”

She pushed me towards the window; but no sooner did I make a movement to go there and open it, than she burst out laughing, and I stayed by her instead. She began to embrace me again:

“We are going away, you know; we ~~are~~ going away to-morrow,” she said; and—evidently the thought had come with a cold shudder over her heart—she looked disconcerted and annoyed. “But, but,” she reflected, “do you think we shall catch granny up? I think we may catch her at Berlin. What do you think she’ll say when we get there, and she sees us? And Mr. Astley?—Ah! ~~she~~ wouldn’t jump off the Schlangenberg. Do you think he would?” She burst out laughing again.

"Listen," she went on, "do you know where he wants to go to next year? He wants to go to the North Pole on a voyage of scientific discovery, and asked me to go with him. Ha, ha, ha! He says that we Russians know nothing, and can do nothing, without other European nations to help us, and show us the way. But he's a good fellow. You know he makes excuses for the general? He says that Blanche—that his passion—oh! I don't know, I don't know," she repeated, apparently losing the thread of her recollections, and becoming confused once more.

"Poor things, how sorry I am for them, and for granny, too," she continued. "Now, listen, listen. How do you suppose you are going to kill De Grier? Surely, surely you never thought you would kill *him*? Oh! you foolish boy. Fancy thinking that I should ever allow you to go out and fight De Grier? Yes, and you are not going to kill the baron, either," she added, laughing suddenly.

"Oh! *how* funny you were with the baron that day. I looked at both of you from the bench I was sitting on. And *how* unwilling you were to go when I bullied you into going. And *how* I laughed, *how* I laughed to see you," she added, bubbling over with mirth at the recollection.

And now she suddenly recommenced embracing and kissing me. She tenderly and passionately pressed her face to mine. I could think of nothing else now; I saw nothing, and heard nothing; my head whirled round and round. . . . I think it must have been about seven in the morning when I awoke and started up—the sun was shining into the room. Paulina was sitting next to me, and watched me with a strange expression. She seemed to be emerging from some sort of gloomy reverie, and to be trying to win her memory back.

She, too, had just awakened, and stared blankly at the table, with the masses of money upon it. My head felt oppressed, and ached badly. I wished to take Paulina's hand, but she pushed mine away, and jumped off from the sofa. The early day was a dark, gloomy one, apparently, and a thin rain fell. Paulina went to the window, opened it, and, supporting herself with outstretched arms by the sides of the framework, she put her head and chest well out into the fresh air, remaining so for full three minutes.

She did not turn round, nor take the slightest notice of me when I spoke to her. I thought to myself, with dread,

"What will happen now, and how is all this business going to end?"

Suddenly she left her hold of the window frame, drew in her head, came to the table, and with an expression of eternal hatred, and her lips trembling with rage, said :

"Now then, give me my fifty thousand francs."

"Paulina! again, are we going to have all that over again?" I began—

"Oh! you've thought better of it? Ha, ha, ha! you're sorry for the money now, are you. Oho!"

The twenty-five thousand florins counted out for her last night lay ready to hand on the table. I packed up the money and gave it to her.

"It's *mine* then, now, is it? is it?" she repeated. Her eyes flashed with malice as she stood looking at me with the money in her hand.

"Of course it is—it always was yours, Paulina," I said.

"Well then, here are your fifty thousand francs for you." She raised her arm and hurled the money back in my face.

The packet struck me and hurt me considerably; it fell on the floor and its contents were scattered over the carpet.

Having done this, Paulina ran straight out of the room.

Of course, I know she was not in her right mind at the moment. I recognise the fact though I cannot understand the nature of her temporary madness, or its cause. She had certainly been ill before, she had not been herself for a month and more. But what was the reason for her present state of mind, and especially for this last sally? Was it wounded pride? Was it despair, that she had been obliged to come to me as she did? Did I give her the impression that I was spoiled or changed by my sudden access of good fortune, and that I desired, like De Grier, to shake myself free of any claims she might have upon my love, offering her fifty thousand francs for my freedom? I know, by my own repose of conscience, that I am perfectly innocent on that score. I think her own vanity was a good deal to blame. Her vanity prompted her to mistrust me and to insult me, on the weakest evidence, on proof that must have appeared most inadequate even to herself. Of course, in a case like this, I was bound, more or less, to be held answerable for De Grier's sins; and would be

held guilty of much, when I was in fact innocent of everything. Of course, too, she was merely raving in a state of delirium ; and I, knowing this, did not make sufficient allowance for the circumstances. Perhaps that is what she cannot forgive me for? Yes, but supposing this theory holds good for now, for now ; how about *then*, though? She surely was not so mad, so thoroughly off her head at first, that she did not know what she did when she came to me with De Grier's letter. Oh, no! she must have known what she was doing.

I hustled all my bank notes, and the piles of gold into my bed, as hastily as I could, covered them up carefully and went out, within ten minutes after Paulina had left me. I felt sure that she had hurried home, and I determined to go to their apartments as quickly as I could and ask the old nurse after "her young mistress' health." What was my amazement then, when I met nurse on the stairs, and she told me that Paulina had not been home at all, and that she (nurse) was on her way to my room to find out if I knew anything about her.

"Why," I said, "she has just left me—ten minutes ago. What can have become of her?" Nurse looked at me reproachfully. However, we soon heard a long story which was already going the round of the house.

The porter and the oberkellner set a whisper afloat that early this morning, about six o'clock, the young lady had rushed out of the hotel, in the fair, and had run away in the direction of the Hôtel d'Angleterre. By their words and hints I soon found out that they knew quite well that Paulina had been in my room all night. Indeed there were stories about concerning the whole of the general's household. Everybody seemed to know that yesterday the general had gone crazy, and had walked about the hotel crying and complaining to everyone he met. It was whispered abroad that the old lady, granny, was his mother, and that she had come all the way from Russia, for the sole purpose of forbidding her son to marry Miss de Cominges, and to disinherit him in case of his disobedience. And since he had not listened to her commands (it was reported), his mother had purposely gone to the roulette-table, and lost all her money before his very eyes, so that there should be nothing left for him to inherit in any case.

"*Diese Russen!*" repeated the oberkellner, irritably, shaking his head ; others only laughed. The oberkellner prepared the hotel bill. However, my winnings of the night before

were known all over the hotel. Karl, the waiter on my landing, was the first to congratulate me; but I had no time for that sort of nonsense. I rushed off to the Hôtel d'Angleterre at once. It was still early. Mr. Astley could not receive anyone, I was told. But hearing that it was I who wanted him, he came out into the passage and stood in front of me, watching me silently and intently, and waiting for me to speak first. I immediately asked after Paulina.

"She is ill," replied Mr. Astley, staring at me obstinately as before, and never taking his eyes off mine for an instant.

"So she really is with you?"

"Oh, yes, she's with me."

"But what are you—are you going to keep her in your rooms?"

"Yes, that is my intention."

"Mr. Astley, it will provoke a scandal. You cannot do it. Besides, she is quite ill; perhaps you have not remarked the nature of her malady?"

"Oh, yes, I have, and I told you she was ill. If she had not been ill, as you say, she would never have passed the night in your apartment."

"So you know that too, do you?"

"Yes, I know it. She came here yesterday, and I would have taken her to a lady, a relation of mine; but being ill, she made a mistake, somehow, and went to your room."

"Think of that, now. Well, I congratulate you, Mr. Astley. By the bye, you give me an idea. Weren't you, perhaps, standing under my window during the night? Miss Paulina was begging me to open the window and see whether you were not standing below there. She laughed mightily over the notion."

"Really? no, I did not stand under the window; but I waited about in the passage, and walked up and down."

"H'm! well, Paulina must be medically treated, you know, Mr. Astley."

"Oh, yes, I've sent for a doctor—if she dies, I shall call you to account for her death."

I was amazed.

"Excuse me, Mr. Astley," I said, "but I do not in the least understand you."

"Is it true that you won two hundred thousand thalers last night?"

"No, only one hundred thousand florins!"

"Oh, well, that's pretty good. So you are off to Paris to-day, are you?"

"Why?"

"All Russians, when they have any money, immediately go to Paris," said Astley, in the voice and tone of a man reading out of a book.

"And pray what am I to do in Paris in the summer, all alone? Besides, I love her! you know I do, quite well, Mr. Astley."

"Really? I am persuaded that you do *not*, my dear sir. Why, if you stay here you will certainly lose all you have, and will have nothing to go to Paris upon. Well, good-bye. I am convinced that you will go to Paris this very morning."

"Very well, good-bye, but I shall *not* go to Paris. Just think now, of the upshot of all this, Mr. Astley. There's the general, and then this final kettle of fish about Miss Paulina; why, it will be all over the town in no time."

"Yes, all over the town—quite so; but as for the general he has not a thought to spare for such trifles as this, he has no time for them. Besides which, Miss Paulina has a perfect right to live exactly wherever she likes. As for her family, we may pretty fairly say that her family is no longer in existence."

I went away much amused at this Englishman's conviction that I was off to Paris. Then again, his threat to shoot me in a duel, if Paulina died, what a quaint idea! I swear I was deeply sorry for Paulina, and yet, strangely enough, ever since I had gone to the roulette-table yesterday and commenced to win, and rake up those masses of money, I had felt that my love for her was moving to another stratum, as it were. I can say this now, but at that time, of course, I had no clear idea of the fact.

Am I really such an inveterate gambler? did I ever really love Paulina so *strangely*. No, I love her to this moment, God knows I do.

However, when I went out from my interview with Mr. Astley, I suffered severely and seriously; I felt myself to be guilty of something or other. But—well, now I must relate a most stupid, but altogether amazing, thing which happened to me at this time.

I was hastening to the general's rooms, when a door near his opened, and somebody called out my name.

It was Madame Veuve de Cominges, and she was calling me at Miss Blanche's request.

They had a small apartment of two rooms ; and on entering, I heard Miss Blanche's voice, talking and laughing in the inner room.

"Is it he?" she was shouting. "Listen, you young rascal. Is it true that you have been winning mountains of gold?"

"Yes," I replied, smiling.

"How much?"

"A hundred thousand florins."

"Oh you young villain. Come in here ; I can't hear a word you say."

I went in ; she was lying in bed under a lovely rose-coloured satin counterpane, from which peeped out her marvellous shoulders, such shoulders as one only sees in a dream ; they were covered with some sort of fine white stuff trimmed with beautiful lace.

"Look here," she cried, when I entered, "look here, are you inclined, if you are a good boy, to be taken to Paris with me? You know, I am off directly."

"How soon?"

"In half-an-hour!"

Her portmanteaus and other luggage were all ready sure enough, and standing in a heap in the corner.

"Well, let's see now ; what will you give me to take you to Paris? Firstly, I shall want fifty thousand francs down ; you can pay me that at Frankfort, on the way there. Then we'll go on to Paris, and you shall see stars in full daylight."

"And what am I to have myself if you are to get my fifty thousand francs?"

"Oh, you'll have a hundred and fifty thousand francs left ; Of course we'll get through that in a couple of months ; but you shall see stars—I vow you shall."

"What, is all this money to go in a month or two?" I cried.

"Of course! What! are you shocked at the idea? Vile slave! why, I tell you *one* month of such life as you shall see will be worth all the rest of your wretched existence. One month—and after that the deluge! but you are not worthy of it ; you don't understand—you are too low for it. Well, go then ; but, remember, I'm off in half-an-hour if you wish to come. I shall expect you, my little tutor!" she cried after me as I went out. On my way home my head had another whirling

attack. What, I thought, was I to do? It was not my fault that Paulina had thrown a packet of money in my face, and had preferred Astley to myself.

Some of the bank-notes which she had thrown at me still fluttered about on the floor; I collected them together. At this moment the door opened and the oberkellner appeared, a gentleman who had scarcely condescended to look at me before. He came to offer me a magnificent set of rooms lower down, which Count B. had just quitted.

I remained a moment, thinking.

"My bill!" I cried, "I'm off at once by train, in five minutes." "If it's Paris—it's Paris," I thought to myself. "I can't help it, if it's fate!"

In a quarter of an hour sure enough there we were, all three of us together—I, Blanche, and Madame de Cominges. Blanche laughed so when she saw me appear, that she nearly went into hysterics; Veuve Cominges joined in her mirth; I can't say I felt particularly gay. My life seemed to have snapped in two. Since yesterday evening I have felt inclined to *risk* everything; to play my life as though it were a game of cards. It may be that I could not bear the sudden downpour of fortune and money, and that I have gone out of my mind? Perhaps I wish for nothing better? It seems to me that the scene is changed for a while, but only for a while.

"Yes, I shall be back here in a month," I thought, "and then, and *then* we'll have it all out, Mr. Astley!"

When I recall that time I feel quite sure that my state of mind was intensely miserable, in spite of the fact that I laughed and chaffed, and laughed again, with that foolish woman, Blanche!

"Oh, you are so silly, you are a dreadful fool, I can see that," cried Blanche, at last, ceasing her laughter and beginning to scold me. "But we'll have a grand time with your hundred and fifty thousand francs all the same! You shall be a little king, and as happy as the day is long—and I'll tie your ties for you—and when we've spent it all you shall come back and break the bank again. You are bold, you're a bold player—those Jews were right enough. You shall often bring me back money to Paris: all I want now is fifty thousand francs, though, and then—

"And the general?" I asked.

"Oh, the general—you know he always goes out at this hour

to buy me a bouquet. I asked him purposely to get me a particularly good one this time. The poor old fellow will come with it and find the bird is flown. He'll come after us, see if he doesn't. Ha, ha, ha! I shall be very glad. He may be very useful to me in Paris. Mr. Astley will have to pay his bill here."

So that was how I went off to Paris.

CHAPTER XVI.

WHAT shall I say of Paris? Of course, it was all madness, a period of wild tom-foolery—a delirium. I lived in Paris just over three weeks, and during that time my hundred thousand francs entirely disappeared. I speak of *one* hundred thousand because I made over the other hundred to Blanche; fifty thousand at Frankfort, and the other fifty a few days later, at Paris.

"As for the balance, my little tutor, we'll eat it up together," she had said. She always called me "Tutor."

You could not imagine a more frugal, careful, and economical creature than Blanche was—with her own money, that is. She told me outright that she required my hundred thousand francs to set her up comfortably in Paris, once and for all. I saw hardly anything of the money; she always kept it, and never allowed me more than a hundred francs at a time in my private purse; generally I had a good deal less.

"Why, what should you want money for?" she would ask me; and I never argued the matter with her. However, she decorated and furnished her house most beautifully with the money; and when I went over to see it all ready, she remarked with pride:

"There! you see what taste and economy can do, even with the most miserable and pitiful resources."

The "miserable resources" spent over the house were exactly fifty thousand francs. With the other fifty thousand francs she bought a beautiful carriage and horses, and gave two balls or evening parties, at which there assisted her friends, Lisette and Hognense, and other remarkably fine women.

At these entertainments I had to act the inconceivably silly part of master of the house, and receive a number of rich merchants, rowdy army lieutenants, newspaper correspondents, and a host of other ignorant and intensely stupid people in dress coats and pearl-tinted gloves, and with such a dowry of conceit upon them, as even we in St. Petersburg consider idiotic; and that is saying a great deal.

They were pleased to chaff me, some of them; for Blanche informed them that I was a tutor who had won a hundred thousand florins:

"And he would not have known how to spend the money if I had not come and helped him, and shown him how to do it. Afterwards he'll go back and be a tutor again," she added. "Don't any of you know of a good situation? I should like to do something for him."

However, I shut myself up in a back room and found refuge and consolation in champagne. I took to champagne a good deal at this time; for I was continually depressed and dull and heavy at heart. I did not approve of the life I was leading, at all. At first—for the first fortnight—Blanche did not like me; I saw that plainly. She took good care of me and dressed me well, and so on, but I did not pay the slightest attention to this sort of thing.

Afterwards, I think she was touched with my conduct towards her; I believe she had expected that I would follow her about with a pencil and paper and jot down jealously every farthing she spent, and quite thought there would be a quarrel over every ten-franc piece that was changed. She used to prepare for such attacks from me, and finding I had no intention of calling her to account, she would sit down and stare at the ceiling for a while. I could see that at first she had considered my silence as merely a proof of my stupidity; but afterwards she thought differently. For instance, she would make some extravagant purchase of horses, and come to me to excuse herself.

"Well, aren't you angry?" she would ask.

"N—no!" I yawned—"don't bother me about it—it's all right—they're good horses, and you needed them—so, of course, it's all right."

"Then you're not angry?"

"Angry! of course not! You are very wise to lay in a stock of things that you need; they'll all come in useful for

you. One hundred thousand francs is merely a drop in the ocean."

Blanche, who had not expected me to receive her tidings in this sort of complaisant fashion, was immensely surprised :

"What," she said, "are you really that sort of man? Do you know what, my little tutor? though you may be but a tutor, you were born to be a prince! So you don't mind the money going so fast?"

"Not I—the faster the better."

"Yes, but listen! You aren't rich; you have too much disdain for money. What will you do afterwards when all this is gone?"

"Oh, afterwards, I shall go to Homburg and win another hundred thousand francs."

"Of course, of course, so you shall—that's splendid; and I know you'll bring it all back here, like a good boy. I tell you what, you'll make me love you seriously before I've done. You know, all this time I haven't loved you, for I thought you nothing but a tutor (which is a sort of flunkey, isn't it?) now I shall begin loving you, really."

And, undoubtedly, from this moment she did seem to attach herself to me; she became very friendly and amiable during our last ten days.

However, I am not going to describe all this time and its doings. I could fill a volume with the narrative of the sort of life we lived; but it would need altogether different colouring and treatment, and I shall not touch upon it at any length in this history. In point of fact, I was most anxious to bring the whole thing to an end; but the money lasted for nearly a month, as I have said before. I must say the length of time it lasted surprised me a good deal. At least eighty thousand of it went for the purchase of various furniture and other things for Blanche, and the remaining twenty thousand we spent in living.

Blanche, who towards the end of the time was quite confiding and candid with me, told me with pride that I was very lucky in that she had not persuaded me to sign any bills in her favour; other people would certainly have imposed upon me in this way, she said, and my ultimate home would have been a debtor's prison.

"So you see how good I am," she said, "and how I have loved you; why, this marriage of mine alone will cost goodness knows *how* much!"

There really was a marriage, sure enough! It took place just at the end of our term, and upon it were spent the ~~last~~ remnants of my hundred thousand francs. After the wedding I retired gracefully into the background, and this stupid phase of my life was at an end.

It happened like this. A week after our arrival in Paris, the general turned up. He drove straight to Blanche's house, and after this first visit of his he seldom was absent from her. Blanche had received him with joy, and had even embraced him on his arrival. She hardly allowed him out of her sight again, and he was accustomed to escort her about the boulevards, and out driving, and at the theatres, and when making calls. He did very well for this sort of thing, being still a good-looking man, with dyed whiskers and moustache (he used to be in the cuirassier guards). His manners were excellent, and he always wore good clothes, and looked well. He took to wearing his Orders, too, in Paris.

With such a man, it was not only possible to walk up and down the boulevards—it was even, if one may use the expression, a positive recommendation.

The good, and mild-hearted old fellow was extremely well contented with all this. He had not the least expected such good fortune when he appeared in Paris. He had come in a state of terror, believing that Blanche would cry out at him, and have him turned out of the house. So that he lived in a sort of transport of unexpected bliss all this month; and in this condition of rhapsody I left him when I went away.

I learned at this time, the details of what happened after our departure from Roulettenberg. The general had had a sort of fit that morning; he fell down insensible, and for a whole week had continued to rave like a lunatic. He had been treated by the doctor, but had suddenly thrown up everything, and gone off to Paris. Of course Blanche's reception of him proved the very best medicine he could have, but the traces of his malady remained for a long while, and he could never engage in any long or serious conversation. His memory was bad, too, and he formed a habit of talking to himself, and of sitting motionless and gloomy for long periods of time, apparently deep in thought.

Only Blanche could reanimate him; in fact these gloomy fits and moods of his simply meant that Blanche had been away, or had gone out without taking him with her, or had not been

sufficiently caressing with him at^{the} parting. When Blanche returned with her gay laugh, and a new dress^{on}, and looking piquante and merry, the general would revive at once; and sometimes his joy would be so great that I have seen him burst into tears.

The general, who had a little money, loved to walk about, and pull out his purse in public; I had the greatest difficulty in preventing him from spending seven hundred francs (he only had one thousand) on a brooch for Blanche. I never could make out where he got this money from, but I think it must have come from Mr. Astley, especially as the latter paid the general's bill at the hotel.

As for the general's opinion of *me* at this time, and his view of my employment in Paris, and about Blanche, I am sure he had not the slightest idea of my intimacy with the latter. Though he may have heard of my winnings at the roulette-table, yet he concluded, I believe, that I was some sort of a secretary, or even a servant to Blanche. At all events, he invariably spoke to me in the most patronising way possible, just as he used to, in fact; and occasionally even went so far as to scold me. He was sometimes very funny in his behaviour to me, goodness knows why, we never could make out; but for some reason or other he was always *à batons rompus* with me. He would shout and swear at me, call me a schoolboy and say he would "teach me better manners," that "*he'd* let me know," and so on. Blanche generally soothed him and took him out for a walk on these occasions. I very often noticed him looking sad and preoccupied, as though he were regretting something, or missed somebody—notwithstanding Blanche's presence, which was usually quite enough for him. On such occasions as this he had twice started talking to me on his own initiative; but he never could say anything very intelligible—he would talk of his military service—his late wife—his lost property, and so on; or he would harp upon some single word or sentence which had no connection whatever with his thoughts or feelings of the moment. I tried to speak to him of his children once or twice; but he very soon changed the subject.

"Yes, yes, the children. You are right, the children," he had said, and then gone off to some other topic.

But the same day, when we were on our way to the theatre, he astonished me by repeating again: "Those un-

fortunate children. Yes, my dear sir, unfortunate children," and again several times during the evening he repeated the words: "Un—fortunate children!"

Once when I spoke of Paulina to him he flew into a violent rage.

"She's an ungrateful woman!" he cried, "yes, sir, she is wicked and ungrateful. She has shamed and disgraced her family! If only there were laws here I'd soon show her all about it. Yes, sir I would; un—grateful woman!"

As for De Grier, he would not even hear his name.

"He ruined me!" he cried, "he robbed me and cut my throat! That man was my nightmare, sir, for two whole years. I dreamed of nothing but him for months at a time. He's a—he's a—oh, never you mention his name to me again—mind—never!"

I could see there was something stirring between Blanche and the general before the former divulged the secret to me; which was a week before we parted.

"He has good prospects," she told me, "for granny is really ill now and will certainly die before long. Mr. Astley has sent a telegram to that effect; he really is the heir, nobody can doubt that; besides, he would do very well if he were *not*. He has his pension, and he can have the side rooms here, all to himself; he'll be as happy as a king. I shall be '*Madame la Générale*.' I shall get into good society" (Blanche always cherished this dream), "and eventually, I shall be a Russian lady of the manor, with a big country mansion and a lot of moujiks and plenty of money."

"Very well—marry him, by all means; but what if he grows jealous?"

"Oh, he sha'n't do anything of the kind, he won't dare. I'll see to that; he shall be well punished if he does."

"Very well—marry him then."

The wedding was very simple and only a few friends were invited. The happy couple were extremely interested in their own position. Blanche tied the general's white tie for him, and really, in his dress-coat, white waistcoat and all complete, he looked remarkably well and distinctly *comme il faut*.

"He really is," said Blanche to me in confidence—the idea of the general being *comme il faut* seemed to strike her as something entirely novel. I don't recollect many of the details of the wedding, as I was only a disinterested spectator; but I

remember that Blanche turned out to be not De Cominges at all (nor was her mother *Veuve de Cominges*), but Du Placet.

Why they should have called themselves De Cominges up to now, I cannot say ; at all events the general did not mind, he liked Du Placet better, he said. On the morning of the wedding he kept walking up and down the room, fully dressed, repeating to himself very seriously, " *Mademoiselle Blanche du Placet, Mademoiselle Blanche du Placet*," while the most radiant self-satisfaction shone upon his face.

At church, at the registry office, and at home at breakfast, he was not only radiant and happy, but was proud and dignified. Blanche, too, acquired a look of dignity on this occasion which she had not possessed before. " I must behave quite differently now," she told me, most seriously ; " but look here, there's one very unpleasant thing I can't get over, I *cannot* pronounce my new name, Zagoriansky, Zagoriansky, Zago—Za—Madame la Générale de Zago—oh ! these Russian names — Madame la Générale fourteen consonants—that'll do, won't it ? "

At last we parted ; and Blanche—the stupid Blanche—actually shed tears when she said " good-bye."

" I thought you a fool," she said, snivelling, " and you do look like one ; but you are a good fellow though you do look a fool ; wait a minute," and running to her desk she took out two thousand-franc notes. I should never have believed it of her.

" There," she said, " these will be useful to you ; because though you may be a very learned tutor, you are a dreadful gabby. I wouldn't give you more than a couple of thousand for anything, because you would be quite sure to lose it. Well, good-bye, we shall always be good friends ; and if you win again you can come here, and we shall see what can be done for you."

I had five hundred francs besides, of my own ; in addition to which I had a capital watch worth another thousand, and several diamond studs and things ; so that I could get along for some time and fear nothing.

I am staying in this little town on purpose to collect my thoughts and form my plans ; but chiefly because I want to see Mr. Astley. I know for certain that he is coming through this place and will stay a day here on some private business. I shall just find out all about . . . everything, first, and then—and then away for Homburg. I shall not go back to Rouletten-

berg until next year. It is considered bad luck to return to the table you won your money at ; besides, they play a smart game at Homburg.

CHAPTER XVII.

HERE'S a year and eight months gone by since I last looked at these notes ; and only now—being bored and worried beyond endurance—I thought I would try to distract my thoughts awhile by reading them over.

So I left off just when I was starting for Homburg, did I ? Gracious heavens ! with what a comparatively light heart I wrote these words then—that is, not exactly a light heart, but with what confidence of, as yet, unshattered hopes.

Had I the least doubt of myself then ? and yet now—but a year and a half later, here I am a good deal worse, I consider, than a beggar—a beggar ? Pooh, I have ruined myself and—but I am not going to draw comparisons or preach myself a moral lecture. Nothing could be sillier than a lecture, now. Oh, you self-satisfied individuals who trot out your sententious sentiments with so much unction, if you only knew how fully I realize the miserable lowness of my present position, I don't think even you would wag your tongues at me. What could you tell me that I don't know ? Besides which, the thing is this, one turn of the wheel and all is changed ; and these same moralists will be the very first to come and congratulate me ; they wouldn't turn their backs on me then. Oh, curse them all. What am I to-day ? Zero ! And what shall I be to-morrow ? Why, to-morrow I may rise from the dead again and begin to live anew. I may make a man of myself yet, before I quite come to grief.

I did go to Homburg, then ; but I also went to Roulettenberg and to Spa ; I also went to Baden as valet to a certain Flintze, a blackguard, and yet my master. I have also figured as a waiter, for five whole months. That was after I had been in prison. I went to prison at Roulettenberg for debt ; somebody or other bought me out—I don't know who—was it Astley, or Paulina ? I don't know who it was, but, anyhow, the

money was paid—two hundred florins, and I was let out. What was I to do next? I took a situation with that Flintze I have mentioned. I started as his secretary, at thirty florins a month; but ended as a sort of valet, because his funds ran low and he could not afford to keep a secretary; I had nowhere else to go to, so I stayed on with him.

I screwed myself in food and drink for five months and accumulated seventy florins. Then, one evening, at Baden, I gave him notice, and the same evening, I went off to the roulette-table. Oh! how my heart beat; but it was not *money* that was so dear to me. Oh no, what I really wanted was that all these Flintzes and oberkellners, and flunkies of all sorts should talk about me to-morrow, and tell one another my story, and wonder at me, and praise me up to the skies, and bow down to me by virtue of my new winnings. All these are childish ideas, of course, but, who knows, perhaps I might meet Paulina, too; and then I could tell her all about it and she should see that I was above all these blows of fate—oh! it was not *money* I wanted most of all. I felt sure that if I had it I should only throw it away on some other Miss Blanche and go driving about Paris with a smart pair of horses of my own, worth sixteen thousand francs each. I am not stingy, I know that for certain; I believe I am even a spendthrift; and yet with what trembling of heart I listened to the croupier's voice:

“*Trente et un, rouge, impaire et passe!*” or,

“*Quatre, noir, pair et manque!*”

With what greediness I gaze at the gambling-tables with their piles of friedrichs d'or and thalers; or the glowing masses of gold which run like fire across the table as the croupier rakes them along; and on the long glittering rows of silver which skirt the roulette-wheel.

Why, when I enter the saloons in which play is going on, no sooner do I come within a couple of rooms of the play and begin to hear the clink of the money changing hands, I assure you my knees shake beneath me and I nearly fall to the ground.

Oh! that evening, when I took my seventy florins to the roulette-table, that was a remarkable evening too. I began with ten florins and staked on “passe.” I have a predilection for “passe.”

I lost. . Then I had sixty florins left, all in silver money—I considered, and decided to try zero. So I staked five gulden at a time on zero, and the third time zero was called.

I nearly died for joy when I received my hundred and seventy-five florins. I don't think I was so truly glad the day that I won my hundred thousand.

I immediately staked a hundred florins on "*rouge*," and won. Then I put the whole two hundred on red again, and won. Four hundred on black, and won.

Reckoning what I had before, I now possessed one thousand seven hundred florins, and all in five minutes. Yes, in such moments as these, all one's former miseries are forgotten. Why, I had amassed this by risking more than life. I had *dared to risk!* and here I was, a man again among men. I took a room at the hotel and shut myself up; and there I sat for three hours counting my money over and over again.

I determined to start for Homburg at once; there I had not served as a flunkey, nor had I been in prison. Half-an-hour before the train started, I went back to the table just to stake *twice, and no more*. And there I dropped one thousand five hundred florins. However, I went to Homburg all the same, and now I have been here a whole month. Of course, I am living in a state of continual tremor. I play for little trivial stakes, and *wait*, always *wait* for something to turn up. I calculate, and stand whole days at the table watching the game. I even dream of the game.

My meeting with Mr. Astley has made a great impression upon me. We had not met since that old time, and now came upon one another quite accidentally. This is now it was.

I was walking about the garden thinking and calculating. I was considering how nearly my funds were exhausted. I had paid my hotel bill three days before, and now had fifty florins left, so that I could only play roulette once more. If I won anything whatever, I could continue a little longer, if *not*, then I must be a flunkey again, unless I could find a Russian family at once who needed a tutor.

Busy with these thoughts, I took my daily walk through the park and the wood, and into the neighbouring duchy. I often walked about like this for four hours at a stretch, returning to Homburg tired and hungry. I had just left the garden, and entered the park, when there was Mr. Astley, seated on a bench. He saw me first, and called out. I went and sat beside him. Observing a certain seriousness about him, I did not give the reins to my joy, though, I confess, I was uncommonly glad to see him.

"So you *are* here? I thought I should see you here," he said. "Don't trouble to tell me your story: I know everything—everything. I know all about your life and doings for the last year and eight months."

"Hem! that's the way to treat old friends," I replied. "It does you credit not to forget them. Wait a minute, though, you give me an idea. Wasn't it you, perhaps, who bought me out of the Roulettenberg prison, where I languished for a debt of a couple of hundred florins? Somebody unknown bought me out."

"No, oh no. *I* didn't buy you out of the Roulettenberg prison, 'where you languished for a debt of two hundred florins,' but I knew that you were 'languishing in the Roulettenberg prison for a debt of two hundred florins.'"

"Oh! then you *do* know who it was that bought me out?"

"No, I can't say that I do know who bought you out."

"Well, it's very strange. None of the Russians know me, and I don't think the Russians here would have done it in any case. In Russia, we do that sort of thing for each other. I thought it must have been some English 'caution,' out of pure cussedness."

Mr. Astley listened to me with apparent astonishment. I believe he expected to find me dejected and miserable.

"Well, at all events, I am very glad to find that you have been able to preserve your independence and good spirits," he observed in a disagreeable tone.

"That is to say, in your heart of hearts, you are filled with annoyance because I am not altogether overwhelmed and cast down," I said, laughing.

He did not take in my words at once, but when he did understand, he smiled.

"I like your remarks. I recognise in them my old, wise, ecstatic, and withal cynical friend. Only Russians could combine in themselves so many inconsistencies at one and the same time. Of course, men love to see their best friends humiliated before them. Friendships very often spring up anew in humiliation—that is a truth known of old to all wise men. However, at present, I assure you, I am sincerely delighted to see that you are not depressed. Tell me, you are not thinking of throwing up the gaming-tables?"

"Oh, the devil take them! I'd throw them up at once, only—"

"Only you want to have a little good luck first. So I thought. All right, you needn't finish your sentence ; I know all about it. It popped out accidentally, and therefore truly. Tell me, do you do anything besides gamble ?"

"No, nothing !"

He commenced examining me. I knew nothing of what was passing in the world ; I had not read a paper or opened a book for months.

"You are sadly hardened," he said. "You have eschewed and thrown over not only your life, and the interest of life, and your interests as a citizen and as a man, and your friends (for you had friends), you have not only thrown all objects aside, save that of gaining money by gambling, but you have given up your memory. I remember you in the most excited moment of your life, but I am convinced that you have forgotten all the best impressions of that moment. Your whole idea now, your highest thoughts and desires, are centred in '*pair et impair*,' '*rouge*,' and the 'twelve middle numbers,' and so on, and so on. I'm convinced of that."

"Enough, enough ! Mr. Astley, please don't remind me of it," I cried, with some show of annoyance, almost with anger ; "let me tell you I have forgotten *nothing* ; I have only driven everything out of my head for a while—even my recollections—and until my affairs become more settled and prosperous ; then I shall arise from the dead again, you shall see."

"*You will still be here ten years hence !*" he said. "I don't mind betting you, if you like, that I will remind you of this ten years hence on this very bench !"

"Well, enough of this," I said irritably. "And to prove to you that I have not forgotten the past, let me ask you : where is Miss Paulina now ? if it was not you bought me out it was assuredly she ! I have not heard a word about her since those days."

"No, oh no ! I don't think she bought you out ! She is in Switzerland at present, and you will do me a great favour if you desist from asking me questions about Miss Paulina," he replied with decision, and almost angrily.

"That means that she hit *you* pretty hard too," I said, laughing in spite of myself.

"Miss Paulina is the noblest of all noble beings ; but I repeat, you will do me the greatest favour in asking me no more about her ! You never knew her thoroughly, and *

THE GAMBLER.

I consider her name from your lips an offence to my feelings."

"But, look here; in the first place you are wrong. Then, what am I to talk about if not *this*? Why, all our common reminiscences centre solely in this subject. Don't be afraid, I shall not require to know anything about your private affairs; I am only interested in, so to speak, the outward position of Miss Paulina at the present moment. I wish to know what her circumstances are, and so on; all I want can be said in a couple of words."

"Very well, on condition that these two words are to be the end of this matter between us. Miss Paulina at first was very ill, she is ill still. She lived with my mother and sisters in the north of England for some time. Six months ago her grandmother—you remember that old lady who behaved so madly?—died and left her a legacy of seven thousand pounds. Miss Paulina is at present travelling with my married sister and her family in Switzerland; her little brother and sister were also provided for by the old lady, and are being educated in London. The general died a short while ago, in Paris, of a stroke. Miss Blanche was good to him, but managed to annex all that he inherited from granny;—there, that's about all, I think."

"And De Grier? isn't he travelling in Switzerland too?"

"No, De Grier is not travelling in Switzerland; I don't know where he is. Besides, I warn you, once for all, to avoid these kind of hints and mean inuendos, otherwise you and I will quarrel."

"What! in spite of our former friendly relations?"

"Yes, notwithstanding our former friendly relations!"

"I beg a thousand pardons, Mr. Astley. But, excuse me one moment; there is nothing offensive or mean in what I say; I do not blame Miss Paulina in the least. Why, between a Frenchman and a Russian girl there is a mutual sympathy of *kind* which you and I can neither appreciate nor understand!"

"If you do not refer to De Grier and—another, by a Frenchman and a Russian girl, what do you mean?"

"You see, you are interested—but it's a long story, Mr. Astley, and you must know a great many anterior circumstances. But your question is serious, though it seems funny at first sight. A Frenchman, Mr. Astley, is to be understood as 'a good-looking fellow.' You, as a Briton, may not agree with this definition; I, a Russian, do not like it myself; but

THE GAMBLER.

young women may be of a different opinion. We may think Racine a humbug or anything we like ; but he is a great poet all the same, Mr. Astley, whether you and I like him or not. The typical Frenchman became the type of beauty to us Russians while we were still bears. Any Frenchman may now (since the Revolution) have the airs, and the manners, and the expression of the typical form of beauty—it is his inheritance ! He may be in himself the most stupid or scoundrelly individual under the sun. Well, Mr. Astley, again, there is no more ingenuous, and simple, and kind-hearted creature than a Russian girl. De Grier, assuming any character, appears under a mask, and can lay siege to her heart with the utmost ease. De Grier has a graceful figure, and she will accept that figure and face as typical of the soul within, and of the heart ; not as a mere garb, inherited from his forefathers ! To your intense disgust I'm afraid I must add that Englishmen are as a rule angular and *inelegant* ! and Russians are very sharp about distinguishing personal beauty and worshipping it ; but to distinguish between beauty of soul and originality of person, one must have a good deal more experience, and fitness, and *practice* than our Russian ladies have.

" Miss Paulina—excuse me, but I've said the name and can't withdraw it—would require ages of time to develop a preference for yourself over that scoundrel De Grier. She will esteem you, and you will be her great friend and enjoy the confidence of her heart ; but in that heart she will preserve the dear image of that detestable, mean, usuring fellow, De Grier. Remember that the man first appeared to her under the glorious personality of the handsome marquis, the *quasi* disinterested assister of her poor family and of the weak-minded general. All his little defects appeared afterwards ; but notwithstanding the revelation—you just give her the old De Grier, as she knew him first, and—and the more she loathes the present and actual De Grier, the more she longs and pines for the old De Grier—although he never existed excepting in her own imagination."

" You are a sugar-refiner, are you not, Mr. Astley ? "

" Yes, I am a partner in the well-known firm of Lovall and Co."

" Well, then, you see, Mr. Astley ; on the one hand a sugar-refiner, and on the other Belvidere Apollo. And I am not even a sugar-refiner, but only a wretched little roulette player,

and have even served as a flunkey—as doubtless Miss Paulina well knows, for her police force seems to be most efficient."

" You are embittered, and that is why you talk all this nonsense," said Astley, coldly, but thoughtfully. " Still there is some originality in what you say."

" Very well; but the worst of it is, my noble friend, that stale and stupid though these accusations of mine may be, still they are true. However, we shall not agree—you and I."

" All this is horrible, wretched nonsense!" he said, " because, because—you must know—" he added, with flashing eyes and voice trembling with emotion, " because—most mean and ungrateful and unworthy and unfortunate man!—you must know, since you will have it, that I have now come to Homburg at her request, *solely to see you*, to speak long and seriously with you, and to let her know all your thoughts and ideas and hopes, and reminiscences."

" Oh surely not, surely not!" I cried, and large tears welled up into my eyes as I listened; I could not help it—they *would* come; and I believe it was the first and only time in my life.

" Yes, wretched man, she loved you, and I can only reveal the fact because you are a ruined man! Yes, and more—if I tell you that she loves you still, at this moment, *you will stay here all the same!* Yes, you have ruined yourself! You possessed certain good traits, you were animated and—well, you were not a bad fellow; you might even have been of some service to your country—which so sadly needs good men; but—you will stay here—and your life is ended. I do not blame you; in my opinion all you Russians are like this, or capable of becoming so; if it be not roulette it will take some other form. Exceptions are very rare. You are not the first man who cannot understand what *work* means. (I am not speaking of your nation now.) Roulette is a game especially Russian; up to this time you have been honest and have preferred to be a waiter rather than take to stealing; but it is terrible to me to think what there may be in store for you in the future; but enough—good-bye. You need money, of course? Here are ten louis d'or from me; I will not offer you more, because you will lose them all the same; take the money, and good-bye."

" No, no, Mr. Astley, after all you have said"—

" Take it," he cried, " I am convinced that you are still

capable of feeling gratitude, and I give as true friend to friend. If only I could believe that you would give up gambling and leave Homburg at once, and go to your own country, I would willingly give you a thousand pounds; but I draw the line at ten louis d'or, because I am perfectly certain that a thousand pounds or ten louis d'or at the present moment are entirely the same thing to you; you will go and lose the money at the roulette-table the very first opportunity; come, take it and good-bye."

"I will take the money," I said, "if I may embrace you at parting."

"Oh, with great pleasure."

We embraced, and Mr. Astley left me.

No, no, he is quite wrong. If I was foolish and harsh about Paulina and De Grier, he is hasty and harsh too, in his estimate of Russians; I don't say a word about myself.

However, all this is humbug; it is all words and words and words, and what we require is action. Switzerland is the one goal and object now, and to-morrow—oh, if I could but start off to-morrow, what a new birth, what a resurrection it would be! I must prove to them all, let Paulina know too, that I can still act the man; all I have to do is—but it's too late for to-day—to-morrow, I feel, I know it must be as I wish. I have fifteen louis d'or now, and I have begun before this, with no more than fifteen gulden. If I began very carefully, now—and surely I am not such an utter child, that I can't understand common sense—though I am a ruined man why should not I rise again from the ashes of my ruin? All I have to do is to be careful and patient for *one day*, to restrain my impetuous nature for one little day—one hour—and in that hour I may change my whole destiny. "My nature is the difficulty.

I must recall to mind what happened to me at Roulettenberg—seven months ago, and just before I lost my all. I certainly did show wonderful decision of character on that day. I had lost all—all—and was on my way out of the gambling saloon, when suddenly I felt a single little florin wobbling about in my waistcoat pocket. "Aha," I thought, "I've got something to pay for my dinner with, after all." But when I had gone some hundred paces further, I stopped, thought a

moment, and came back. I staked my gulden on "manque," and there really was something very curious and special in the sensation that I, a stranger in a foreign land, without money or friends, and not even knowing how I should get anything to eat this very day, was staking my last gulden, my *very last* on the turn of a wheel! Well, I won; and I came out that day with a hundred and seventy guldens in my pocket; and that's a fact. There, that's an instance of what one gulden, and the last gulden a man has, too, can do. And what would have happened that day if I had lost heart and funk'd it?

Ah, well, there'll be an end of all this sort of thing to-morrow.

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